THE MUTABLE MANY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS
A WOMAN INTERVENES
IN A STEAMER CHAIR
FROM WHOSE BOURNE

THE MUTABLE MANY

BY

ROBERT BARR

'For the mutable, rank-scented many, let them
Regard me as I do not flatter, and
Therein behold themselves'

CORIOLANUS

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He that trusts to you,
Where he should find you lions, finds you hares;
Where foxes, geese: you are no surer, no,
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,
Or hailstone in the sun. Your virtue is,
To make him worthy whose offence subdues him,
And curse that justice did it. Who deserves greatness
Deserves your hate; and your affections are
A sick man's appetite, who desires most that
Which would increase his evil. He that depends
Upon your favours swims with fins of lead
And hews down oaks with rushes. Hang ye! Trust ye?
With every minute you do change a mind,
And call him noble that was now your hate,
Him vile that was your garland.

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THE MUTABLE MANY

CHAPTER I

THE business offices of Messrs. Monkton and Hope's great factory literally hung between heaven and earth. Heaven, from this point of view, consisted of a brooding London fog, hovering a hundred feet above the city, hesitating to fall; while earth was represented by a sticky, black-cindered factory-yard, bearing the imprint of many scores of boots.

The offices were built between the two huge blocks known as the 'Works.' The situation had evidently been an after-thought, for this addition was constructed of wood and glass; while the two great buildings which were thus joined together, like Siamese twins of industry, were of brick. Although no architect had ever foreseen the erection of such a structure between the two buildings, yet necessity, the mother of invention, had given birth to what the manager of the factory always asserted to be the most conveniently situated offices in London. More and more room had been required in the big buildings as business increased, and the offices—the soul of a vibrating mass of energetic mechanism—had, as it were, to take up a position outside the body.

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The addition, then, hung over the roadway which ran between the two buildings; it commanded a view of both front and back yards, and had, therefore, more light and air than the office which John Sartwell, the manager aforesaid, had formerly occupied in the left-hand building. Its unique situation caused it to be, to a large extent, free from the pulsation produced by the machinery; and as a door led into each wing of the Works, the offices gave easy access to both. Sartwell was very proud of these rooms and their position, for they were of his planning, and he had thus given the firm much additional space, with no more ground occupied than had been occupied before—a most desirable consideration in a crowded city like London.

Two rooms at the back were set apart for the two members of the firm, while Sartwell's office in front was twice the size of either partner's room, and extended across the whole space between the two buildings. This was as it should be, for Sartwell did double the amount of work the owners of the business accomplished; and, if it came to that, had twice the brain-power of the two members of the firm combined, who were there simply because they were the sons of their fathers. The founders of the firm had, with hard work and shrewd management, established the large manufactory, but its present prosperity was due to Sartwell, and not to the men whose names were known to the public as the heads of the business.

Monkton and Hope were timid, cautious, somewhat irresolute men, as capitalists should be all the world over. They had unbounded confidence in their manager, and generally shifted any grave responsibility or unpleasant decision to his shoulders, which bore the burdens placed upon them with equanimity. Sartwell was a man of iron, with firm, resolute lips, and steely-blue eyes of a sort that were most disconcerting to any one who had something not quite straight

to propose. Even the two partners quailed under these eyes, and gave way before them if it came to a conflict of opinion. Sartwell's rather curt 'It won't do, you know,' always settled things.

Sartwell knew infinitely more about the works than they did; for while they had been at college, the future manager was working his way up into the confidence of their fathers, and every step he took advanced his position in the factory. The three men were as nearly as possible of the same age, and the hair of each was tinged with grey; Sartwell's, perhaps, more than the others.

It is difficult to think of love in conjunction with the two partners, yet it is pleasing to know that when love did come to them at the proper time of life, it arrived with gold and a rigid Nonconformist conscience. The two had thus added wealth to wealth by marrying; and, as their wives were much taken up with deeds of goodness, done only after strict and conscientious investigation, so that the unworthy might not benefit, and as both Monkton and Hope were somewhat timorous men who were bound to be ruled by the women they married, some of their wealth found its way into the coffers of struggling societies and organizations for the relieving of distress.

Thus there came to impregnate the name of Monkton and Hope (Limited) a certain odour of sanctity which is most unusual in business circles in London. The firm, when once got at, could be counted on for a subscription almost with certainty; but alas! it was not easy to get at the firm. The applicant had to come under the scrutiny of those searching eyes of Sartwell's, which had a perturbing habit of getting right at the heart of a matter with astonishing quickness; and when once he said, 'It won't do, you know,' there was no going behind the verdict.

A private stair-way led from the yard below to the hall in the suspended building, which divided the large

office of the manager from the two smaller private rooms of the firm. This stair-way was used only by the three men. The clerks and the public came in by the main entrance, where a watchful man sat behind a little, arched, open window, over which was painted the word 'Inquiries.'

Outside in the gloom the two great lamps over the gate-posts flared yellow light down on the cindery roadway and into the narrow street beyond. Through the wide-open gateway into the narrow stone-paved street poured hundreds of working-men. There was no jostling, and they went out silently, which was unusual. It seemed as if something hovered over them even more depressing than the great fog-cloud above their heads.

Sartwell, alone in his office, stood somewhat back from the window, unseen; and watched their exit grimly, sternly. The lines about his firm mouth tightened his lips into more than their customary rigidity. He noticed that now and then a workman cast a glance at the windows; and he knew they cursed him in their hearts as standing between them and acquiescence in their demands, for they were well aware that the firm would succumb did Sartwell but give the word.

The manager knew that at their meetings their leader had said none was so hard on working-men as a workman who had risen from the ranks. Sartwell's name had been hissed, while the name of the firm had been cheered; but the manager was not to be deterred by unpopularity, although the strained relations between the men and himself gave him good cause for anxiety.

As he thought over the situation, and searched his mind to find whether he himself were to blame in any way, there was a rap at the door. He turned quickly away from the window, stood by his desk, and said sharply, 'Come in.'

There entered a young man in workman's dress, with his cap in his hand. His face was frank, clear cut, and intelligent; and he had washed it when his work was done—a weakness not indulged in by the majority of his companions.

'Ah, Marston,' said the manager, his brow clearing when he saw who it was. 'Did you get that job done in time?'

'It was off before half-past five, sir.'

'Right. Were there any obstacles thrown in your way?'

'None that could not be surmounted, sir.'

'Right, again. That's the way I like to have things done. The man who can accomplish impossibilities is the man for me, and the man who gets along in this world.'

The young fellow turned his cap over and over in his hands, and, although he was evidently pleased with the commendation of the manager, he seemed embarrassed. At last he said, hesitatingly,—

'I am very anxious to get on in the world, sir.'

'Well, you may have an opportunity shortly,' replied the manager. Then he suddenly shot the question: 'Are you people going to strike?'

'I'm afraid so, sir.'

'Why do you say afraid? Are you going out with the others, or do you call your soul your own?'

'A man cannot fight the Union single-handed.'

'You are talking to one who is going to.'

The young man looked up at the manager.

'With you it is different,' he said. 'You are backed by a wealthy company. Whether you win or lose, your situation is secure. If I failed the Union in a crisis, I could never get another situation.'

Sartwell smiled grimly when Marston mentioned the firm. He knew that there lay his weakness rather than his strength; although the firm had said he was to have a free hand, he was certain the moment

the contest became bitter Monkton and Hope would be panic-stricken. Then, if the women interfered, the battle was as good as lost. Had the strikers known on which side their bread was buttered they would have sent a delegation of their wives to Mrs. Monkton and Mrs. Hope. But they did not know this, and Sartwell was not the man to show the weakness of his hand.

'Yes,' said the manager, 'I have the entire confidence of Mr. Monkton and of Mr. Hope. I wonder if the men appreciate this fact?'

'Oh yes, sir, they know that.'

'Now, Marston, have you any influence with the men?'

'Very little, I'm afraid, sir.'

'If you have any, now is the time to exert it; for their sakes, you know, not for mine. The strike is bound to fail. Nevertheless, I don't forget a man who stands by me.'

Marston shook his head.

'If my comrades go, I'll go with them. I am not so sure that the strike is bound to fail, although I am against it. The Union is very strong, Mr. Sartwell. Perhaps you do not know that it is the strongest Union in London.'

The manager allowed his hand to hover for a moment over a nest of pigeon-holes, then he drew out a paper and gave it to Marston.

'There is the strength of the Union,' he said. 'Down to the £17 8*s.* 2*d.* they put in the bank yesterday afternoon. If you want any information about your Union, Marston, I shall be happy to oblige you with it.'

The young man opened his eyes widely as he looked at the figures.

'It is a very large sum,' he said.

'A respectable fighting fund,' remarked Sartwell, impartially. 'But how many Saturdays do you think

it would stand the drain of the pay-roll in this establishment?'

'Not very many, perhaps.'

'It would surprise you to know how few. The men look at one side of this question only, while I am compelled to look at both sides. If on any Saturday their pay were not forthcoming, they would not be pleased, would they? Now I have to scheme and plan so that the money is here every Saturday, and, besides, there must be enough more to pay the firm for its investment and its risk. These little details may not seem important to a demagogue who knows nothing of business, but who can harangue a body of men and make them dissatisfied. I should be well pleased to give him my place here for a month or two while I took a rest, and then we would see whether he thought there was anything to be observed from my point of view.'

'Mr. Sartwell,' said Marston, looking suddenly at the manager. 'Some of the moderate men asked me to-night a similar question to one of yours.'

'What question was that?'

'They asked if I had any influence with you.'

'Yes? And you told them——?'

'That I didn't know.'

'Well, you will never know until you test the matter. Have you anything to suggest?'

'Many are against a strike, but even the more moderate think you are wrong in refusing to see the delegation. They think the refusal seems high-handed, and say that if you were compelled to reject any requests made, you ought not to let things come to a crisis without at least allowing the delegation to present the men's case.'

'And do you think I am wrong in this?'

'I do.'

'Very well. I'll settle that in a moment. You get some of those men together, head the delegation your-

self, I will make an appointment with you, and we will talk the matter over.'

The young man did not appear so thoroughly satisfied with this prompt concession as might have been expected. He made no reply for some moments, while the elder man looked at him critically, with his back against the tall desk.

At last Marston spoke.

'I could not lead the deputation, being one of the youngest in the employ of the firm. The secretary of the Union is the leader the men have chosen.'

'Ah! The secretary of the Union! That is quite a different matter. He is not in our employ. I cannot allow outsiders to interfere in any business with which I am connected. I am always willing to receive our own men either singly or in deputation, and that is no small concession where so many are at work; but if I am to open the office doors to the outside world—well, life is too short. For instance, I discuss these things with you, but I should decline to discuss them with any man who dropped in out of the street.'

'Yes, I see the difficulty; but don't you think you might make a concession in this instance to avoid trouble?'

'It wouldn't be avoiding trouble; it would merely be postponing it. It would form a precedent, and I should have this man or that interfering time and again. I should have to make a stand sooner or later, perhaps when I was not so well prepared. If there is to be a fight, I want it now. We need some new machinery, and could do with a week's shut-down.'

Marston shook his head. 'The shut-down will be for longer than a week,' he said.

'I know that. The strike will last exactly three weeks. A month from now there will be no Union.'

'Perhaps there will also be no factory.'

'You mean there is danger of violence? Very well. In that case the strike will last but a fortnight. You

see, my boy, we are in London, and there are not only the police within a moment's call, but at the back of them the soldiers, and at the back of the soldiers the whole British Empire. Oh no, Marston, it won't do, you know, it won't do.'

'The men are very determined, Mr. Sartwell.'

'All the better. I like a determined antagonist, for he knows when he's beaten, and so we get things settled once for all. I don't object to a square stand-up fight; but eternal haggling and higgling and seeing deputations and arbitrators, and all that sort of thing, I cannot endure. Let us know where we are, and when that's clear let us get on with our work.'

'Then you have nothing to propose, Mr. Sartwell? Nothing conciliatory, I mean.'

'Certainly I have. Let the men tell that blatant ass Gibbons to attend to his secretarial duties, and when a deputation from our own workshops comes up to see me, we'll discuss the situation. If they have any just grievance I will remedy it for them. What can be fairer than that?'

'It's got to be a matter of principle with the men now—that is, the inclusion of Gibbons has. It means recognizing the Union.'

'Oh, I'll recognize the Union, and take off my hat to it—that is, so far as my own employés are concerned; but I will not have an outsider, who knows nothing of this business, come up here and spout nonsense. It's a matter of principle with me as well as with the men.'

Marston sighed.

'I'm afraid there's nothing for it then but a fight,' he said.

'Perhaps not. One fool makes many. Think well, Marston, on which side you are going to be in this fight. I left a Union, and although I was older than you are at the time, I never repented it. It kept me out of employment, but not for long; and I was kept

out of it in the very business of which I am now manager. The Union is founded on principles that won't do, you know. Any scheme which tends to give an inferior workman the same wages as a good workman is all wrong.'

'I don't agree with you, Mr. Sartwell. The only hope for the working-man is in combination. Of course, we make mistakes, and are led away by demagogues, but some day there will be a strike led by an industrial Napoleon. Then we will settle things once for all, as you said a while ago.'

Sartwell laughed and held out his hand.

'Oh, that's your ambition, is it? Well, good luck attend you, my young Napoleon. I should have chosen Wellington, if I had been you. Good-night. I am expecting my daughter, and have no more time to spare.'

Marston held the hand extended to him so long that the manager looked at him in astonishment. The colour had mounted from the young man's cheeks to his brow, and his eyes were on the floor.

'Mr. Sartwell,' he said, with an effort, 'I came to-night to speak to you about your daughter, and not about the strike.'

The manager dropped the hand as if it had been red-hot, and stepped back two paces.

'About my daughter?' he cried, sternly. 'What do you mean?'

Marston had to moisten his lips once or twice before he could reply. His released hand opened and shut nervously.

'I mean,' he said, 'that I am in love with her.'

The manager sat down in the office-chair beside his table. All the former friendliness had left his face, and his dark brows lowered over his keen eyes, into which their usual cold glitter had returned.

'What folly is this?' he cried, with rising anger. 'You are a boy, and may have risen from the gutter,

for all I know. My daughter is but a child yet; she is only——'

He paused. He had been about to say 'seventeen,' when it occurred to him that he had married her mother when she was but a year older.

Marston's colour became a deeper red when the manager spoke so contemptuously of the gutter. He said slowly, and with a certain doggedness in his tone,—

'It is no reproach to come from the gutter; the reproach is in staying there. I have left it, and I don't intend to return.'

'Oh, intend!' cried the manager, impatiently. "We all know what is paved with intentions. Why, you have never even spoken to the girl!'

'No, but I mean to.'

'Do you? Well, I shall take very good care that you do not.'

'What have you against me, Mr. Sartwell?'

'What is there for you? Perhaps you will kindly specify your qualifications.'

'You are very hard on me, Mr. Sartwell. You know that if I did come from the gutter, I have studied hard and worked hard. What education I have I gave to myself. Does that count for nothing? I have a good character, and I have a good situation——'

'You have not. I discharge you. You will call at the office to-morrow, get your week's money, and go.'

'Oh.'

'Yes, "Oh." You did not think that of me, did you?'

'I did not.'

'Well, for once you are right. I merely wish to show you that your good situation depends on the caprice of one man. I have no intention of discharging you. I am not so much afraid of you as that. I'll look after my daughter.'

Marston said, bitterly,—

'Gibbons, ass as he is, is right when he says that no one is so hard on a workman as one who has risen from the ranks. You were no better off than I am, when you were my age.'

Sartwell sprang to his feet, his eyes ablaze with anger.

'Pay attention, young man,' he cried. 'All the things you have done, I have done. All the things you intend to do, I have already done. I have, in a measure, educated myself, and I have worked hard night and day. I have attained a certain positi , a certain responsibility, and have acquired a cer n amount of money. I have had little pleasure and much toil in my life, and I am now growing old. Yet as I look back, I see that there was as much luck as merit in my success. I was ready when the chance came; that was all; if the chance hadn't come, all my readiness would have done me little good. For one man who succeeds, a dozen, equally deserving, fail. Now, why have I gone through all this? Why? For myself? Not likely. I have done it so that my daughter may not be that tired drudge, a workman's wife—so that she may begin where I leave off. That's why. For myself, I would as soon wear a workman's jacket as a manager's coat. And now having gone through all this for her sake—you talk of love! What is your love for her compared with mine?—When I have done all this that she may never know what want means, shall I be fool enough, knave enough, idiot enough, to thrust her back where I began, at the beck of the first mouthing ranter who has the impudence to ask for her? No, by God, no! Now you have had your answer, get out, and don't dare to set foot in this office till you are sent for.'

Sartwell, in his excitement, smote the desk with his clenched fist to emphasize his sentences. Marston shrank before his vehemence, realizing that no work-

man had ever seen the manager angry before, and he dreaded the resentment that would rise in Sartwell's heart when the coldness returned. He felt that it would have been more diplomatic if he had left sooner. Nevertheless, seeing that things could be no worse, he stood his ground.

'I thought,' he said, 'that it would be more honourable in me to let you know——'

'Don't talk to me of honour! Get out.'

At that moment the door from the private stair-way opened, and a young girl came in. Sartwell had completely forgotten his appointment with his daughter, and both men were taken aback by her entrance.

'I knocked, father,' she said, 'but you did not hear me.'

'In a moment, Edna. Wait in the hall for a moment,' said her father, hurriedly.

'I beg of you not to leave, Miss Sartwell,' said Marston, going to the door and opening it. 'Good-night, Mr. Sartwell.'

'Good-night,' said the manager, shortly.

'Good-night, Miss Sartwell.'

'Good-night,' said the girl, sweetly, with the suggestion of a bow.

The eyes of the two men met for a moment; in each challenging glance was the obstinacy of their race; but the eyes of the younger man seemed to say defiantly: 'I *have* spoken to her, you see.'

CHAPTER II

MEN speak of their individuality as if such a thing really existed—as if they were actually themselves, forgetting that all men are but the sum of various qualities belonging to ancestors, most of whom are dead, and gone, and forgotten. The shrewd business man in the City imagines that his keen instincts are all his own; he does not recognize the fact that those attributes which enable him to form a joint-stock company, helped an ancestor of his in the Middle Ages to loot a town, or a highwayman of a later day to relieve a fellow-subject of a full purse on a lonely heath.

Edna Sartwell possessed one visible, undeniable, easily recognized token of heredity; she had her father's eyes, but softened and luminous and disturbingly beautiful; eyes to haunt a man's dreams. They had none of the searching, rapier-like incisiveness which made her father's eyes weapons of offence and defence. But they were his, nevertheless, with a kindly womanly difference; and in that difference lived again the dead mother.

'Edna,' said her father, when they were alone, 'you must not come to this office again.'

There was more of sharpness in his tone than he was accustomed to use toward his daughter, and she looked up at him quickly.

'Have I interrupted an important conference?' she asked. 'What did the young man want, father?'

'He wanted something which I was unable to grant.'

'Oh, I am sorry. He appeared so disappointed. Was it a situation?'

'Something of the sort.'

'And why couldn't you give it to him? Isn't he worthy?'

'No, no! No, no!'

'He seemed to me to have such a good face—he looked honest and straightforward.'

'Good gracious, child, what do you know about faces? Do not interfere in business matters; you don't understand them. Don't chatter, chatter, chatter. One woman who does that is enough in a family—as much as a man can stand.'

The daughter became silent; the father pigeonholed some papers, took them out again, rearranged them, and placed them back. He was regaining control over himself. He glanced at his daughter and saw tears in her eyes.

'There, there, Edna,' he said. 'It is all right. I'm a little worried to-night, that's all. I'm afraid there's going to be trouble with the men. It is a difficult situation, and I have to deal with it alone. A strike seems inevitable, and one never can tell where it will end.'

'And is he one of the strikers? It seems impossible.'

A look of annoyance swept over her father's face.

'He? Why the—— Edna, you return to a subject with all the persistency of a woman. Yes. He will doubtless go on strike to-morrow with all the rest of the fools. He is a workman, if you want to know; and furthermore he is going on strike when he doesn't believe in it—going merely because the others go. He admitted as much to me shortly before you came

in. So you see how little you are able to read in a man's face.'

'I shouldn't have thought it,' said the girl, with a sigh. 'Perhaps if you had given him what he wanted he would not go on strike.'

'Oh, now you are making him out worse than even I think him. I don't imagine he is bribable, you know.'

'Would that be bribery?'

'Suspiciously like it; but he can strike or not as he wishes—one more or less doesn't matter to me. I hope if they go, they will go in a body; a few remaining would only complicate things. Now that you understand all about the situation, are you satisfied? It isn't every woman I would discuss it with, you know, so you ought to be flattered.'

Sartwell was himself once more, and he was mentally resolving not to be thrown off his guard again.

'Yes, father, thank you,' said the girl. 'The cab is waiting,' she added, more to let him know that, so far as she was concerned, the discussion was ended, than to impart the information conveyed in her words.

'Let it wait. That's what cabs are for. The cabby usually likes it better than hurrying. Sit down a moment, Edna. I'll be ready presently.'

The girl sat down beside her father's table. Usually, Mr. Sartwell preferred his desk to his table, for the desk was tall, where a man stands when he writes. This desk had three compartments, with a lid to each. These were always locked, and Sartwell's clerks had keys for two of them. The third was supposed to contain the manager's most private papers, as no one but himself ever saw the inside of it. The lid locked automatically when it was shut down, and the small key which opened it dangled at Sartwell's watch-chain.

Edna observed her father as he unlocked one after another of the compartments, and apparently re-

arranged his papers. There was always about his actions a certain well-defined purpose, but the girl could not help noticing that now he appeared irresolute and wavering. He seemed to be marking time rather than making progress with any definite work. She wondered if the coming strike was worrying him more than he had been willing to admit. She wished to help, but knew that nothing would be more acceptable to him than simply leaving him alone. She also knew that when her father said he would be ready to go home with her at a certain hour, he usually was ready when that hour came. Why, then, did he now delay his departure?

At last Sartwell closed down the lid of one desk, and locked it as if he were shutting in his wavering purpose; then he placed the key from his watch-guard in the third lock and threw back the cover. An electric light dangling by a cord from the ceiling threw down into the desk rays reflected by a circular opal shade which covered the lamp. The manager gazed for a few moments into the desk, then, turning to his daughter, said—

'Edna, you startled me when you came in to-night.'

'I am very sorry, father. Didn't you expect me?'

'Yes, but not at that moment, as it happened. You are growing very like your mother, my girl.'

There was a pause, Edna not knowing what to say. Her father seldom spoke of his dead wife, and Edna could not remember her mother.

'Somehow I did not realize until to-night—that you are growing up. You have always been my baby to me. Then—suddenly—you came in. Edna, she was only four years older than you are now when she died. You see, my dear, although I grow older, she always remains young—but I sometimes think that the young man who was her husband is dead too, for there is not much likeness to him remaining in me.'

Sartwell had been drumming lightly with his fingers

on the desk-top as he spoke; now he reached up and turned off the electric light as if its brilliancy troubled him. The lamp in the centre of the room was sufficient, and it left him in the shadow.

'I suppose,' continued Sartwell, 'there comes a time in the life of every father when he learns with something of a shock that the little girl who has been playing about his knee is a young woman. It resembles what a man feels when he hears himself alluded to as old for the first time. I well remember how it made me catch my breath when I first heard myself spoken of as an old man.'

'But you are not old,' cried the girl, with a little indignant half-sob in her voice. She wished to go to her father and put her arms round his neck, but she felt intuitively that he desired her to stay where she was until he finished what he had to say.

'I am getting on in that direction. None of us grow younger—but the dead. I suppose a daughter is as blind to her father's growing old, as he to her advancing womanhood. However, we won't talk of my age. We are welcoming the coming rather than speeding the going, to-night. You and I, Edna, must realize that we, in a measure, begin life on a new line with each other. We are both grown-up people. When your mother was a little older than you are, I had her portrait painted. She laughed at me and called me extravagant; you see, we were rather needy then, and she imagined, poor girl, that a portrait of herself was not exactly a necessity. I have thought since that it was the only necessary thing I ever bought. I had it copied when I got richer by a noted painter, who did it more as a favour to me than for the money—for painters do not care to copy other men's work. Curiously enough, he made a more striking likeness of her than the original picture. Come here, my girl.'

Edna sprang to her father's side, and rested her

hand lightly on his shoulder. Sartwell turned on the electric light. At the bottom of the desk lay a large portrait of a most beautiful woman. The light shone down on the face, and the fine eyes looked smilingly up at them.

'That was your mother, Edna,' said the father, almost in a whisper, speaking with difficulty.

The girl was crying softly, trying not to let her father know it. Her hand stole from the shoulder next her, to the other; his hand caressed her fair hair.

'Poor father,' she said, trying to speak bravely. 'How lonely you must have been! I seem to—to understand things—that I didn't before—as if I had suddenly grown old.'

They looked at the picture for some time together in silence; then she said—

'Why did you never show me the portrait before?'

'Well, my dear, it was here and not at the house; and when you were a little girl, you did not come to the office, you know. Then, you see, your stepmother had the responsibility of bringing you up—and—and—somehow I thought it wouldn't be giving her a fair chance. The world is rather hard on stepmothers.' He hurriedly closed the desk. 'Come, come,' he cried, brusquely, 'this won't do, you know, Edna. But this is what I wanted to say. I would like you to remember—to understand, rather—that you and I are, as it were, alone in the world—there is a bond between us in that, as well as in the fact that we are father and daughter. I want you always to feel that I am your best friend, and there must never come any misunderstanding between us.'

'There never could, father,' said the girl, solemnly.

'That's right, that's right. Now, if anything should happen to trouble you, I want you to come to me and tell me all about it. There should be complete confidence between us. If anything perplexes you, tell me; if it is trivial I want to know, and if it is serious

I want to know. Sometimes an apparently trivial problem is really a serious one, and *vice versa.* Remember it is almost as important to classify your problem as to solve it, and there's where I can help you, for even if I could not disentangle the skein, I could perhaps show you that it was not worth unravelling.'

The girl regarded her father earnestly while he spoke, and then, as if to show that woman's intuition will at once touch a spot round which a man's reason is elaborately circling, she startled him by saying—

'Father, something has happened concerning me, which has made you anxious on my account. What is it? I think I should know. Has my step-mother been saying——'

'No, no, my child, your step-mother has been saying nothing about you; and if she had, I would not—that is, I would have given what she said my best attention. You mustn't jump at conclusions; perhaps I am talking with unnecessary seriousness; all I wish to impress upon you is that, although I am seemingly absorbed in business, you are much more important to me than anything else—that, in fact, since your mother died, you are the only person who has been of real importance to me; and so if you want anything let me know—a new frock, for instance, of exceptional expensiveness. I think you will find that where your happiness is concerned, I shall not allow any prejudice of mine to stand in the way.'

The girl looked up at her father with a smile.

'I don't think my happiness will be endangered for lack of a new gown,' she said.

'Well, dress is very important, Edna—we mustn't forget that; though I merely instanced dress for fear you might take me too seriously. And now, my girl, let us get home. This is our last conference here, you know, and there has somehow entered into it the

solemnity which pertains to all things done for the last time. Now, if you are ready, I am.'

'Not quite, father. You see, I like this office—I always did—and now—after to-night—it will seem sacred to me. All this talk has been about an insignificant person and her clothes; but what impresses me, father, is how much alone you have been, nearly all your life. I never recognized that before. Now, after this, you must talk over your business with me; I may not be able to help, at first, but later on, who can tell? Then it will flatter me by making me think our compact is not one-sided. Is it a bargain, father?'

'It is a bargain, Edna.'

The father drew the daughter towards him and the bargain was sealed. He turned out the lights, and they hurried down the stairs to the slumbering cabman. The fog had by this time settled down almost on the top of his head.

'Waterloo Station, main line,' cried Sartwell, sharply.

'Yessir,' said the cabby, exceedingly wide-awake, as he gathered up the reins. The porter opened the gates.

'Everything all right, Perkins?'

'All right, sir,' answered the porter, touching his cap.

'Keep a sharp look-out, you know.'

'Yes, sir.'

The rapidly lessening rattle of the hansom down the narrow street came back to Perkins as he closed the big gates for the night.

CHAPTER III.

As father and daughter approached Wimbledon a mutual silence came over them. Perhaps this was because they had talked so much in the office. When they passed the station gates, Sartwell said—

'We'll have a cab, Edna.'

'I don't mind walking, in the least; there is no fog here.'

'We're late, so we'll have a cab.' Once inside, he added, reflectively, 'I wonder why it is that a cab seems extravagance in Wimbledon and economy in London.'

This, apparently, was a problem neither of them could solve; so nothing more was said until the vehicle drew up at the door of a walled-in garden in a quiet street near the breezy Common. Sartwell put his key in the door, held it open, and let his daughter pass in before him. A square house stood about a hundred yards back from the street, surrounded by shrubbery and flower-beds. The two walked somewhat gingerly up the crunching gravel path, opened the front door, and entered a dimly lighted hall.

Sartwell placed his hat on the rack, pushed open the dining-room door, and went in, this time preceding his daughter. There were many comfortable chairs in the room, and one that was not comfortable. On

that chair sat a woman, tall and somewhat angular; past the prime of life. She sat exceedingly upright, not allowing her shoulders to rest against the chair-back. On her face was a patient expression of mitigated martyrdom; the expression of one who was badly used by a callous world, but who is resolved not to allow its ill-treatment to interfere with her innate justice in dealing with her fellows.

'I thought I heard a cab drive up and stop,' she said, mildly, in the tone of one who may be wrong and is willing to be corrected.

'You did,' said Sartwell, throwing himself down in an arm-chair. 'Being late, I took a cab from the station.'

'Oh!' Much may be expressed by an apparently meaningless interjection. This one signified that Mrs. Sartwell, while shocked at such an admission, bowed to the inevitable, recognizing that she was mated with a man not amenable to reason, and that, while she might say much on the pernicious habit of unnecessary lavishness, she repressed herself, although she knew she would have no credit for her magnanimity.

After a few moments' silence, during which Mrs. Sartwell critically examined the sewing on which she was engaged, she looked across at her husband, and said—

'I may ask, I suppose, if it was business kept you so late?'

'Important business.'

She sighed. 'It always is. I should know that by this time without asking. Some men make business their god, although it will prove a god of clay to call upon when the end comes. There is such a thing as duty as well as business, and a man should have some little thought for his wife and his home.'

This statement seemed so incontrovertible that Sartwell made no effort to combat it. He sat there

with his head thrown back, his eyes closed, and his hands clasped supporting his knee. This attitude Mrs. Sartwell always regarded as the last refuge of the scoffer—an attitude he would be called upon to account for, as a sinner must account for evil deeds.

'Father has had more than usual to worry him at the office to-day,' said Edna. She stood by the table, having removed her hat and gloves.

A look of mild surprise passed over Mrs. Sartwell's face. She turned her head slowly round, and coldly scrutinized her step-daughter from head to foot. She thus apparently became aware of her presence for the first time—which may be explained by the fact that the young woman entered the room behind her father.

'Edna,' said Mrs. Sartwell, 'how often have I told you not to put your hat and gloves on the dining-room table? There is a place for everything. I am sure that when you visit your father's office, which you are so fond of doing, you find everything in its place—for he is at least methodical. You certainly do not take your disorderly habits from him; and everybody, except perhaps your father and yourself, admits that you live in an orderly household. How did you get that stain on your frock?'

Edna looked quickly down at her skirt; the hansom wheel had, alas, left its mark. Half a crown an hour does not represent all the iniquities of a hansom on a muddy day.

'You are my despair, Edna, with your carelessness; and no one knows how it hurts me to say so. That frock you have had on only——'

'Edna,' cried her father, peremptorily, 'are you hungry?'

'No, father.'

'Sure?'

'Quite sure. I am not in the least hungry.'

'Then go to bed.'

Edna came round the table to where her step-

mother sat, and kissed her on the cheek. 'Good-night,' she said.

'Good-night, my poor child,' murmured Mrs. Sartwell, with a sigh.

The girl kissed her father, whispering as she did so, 'I'm afraid I'm your little girl again, judging by the way you order me off to bed.'

'You will always be my little girl to me, my dear,' he said. 'Good-night.'

Mrs. Sartwell sighed again as Edna closed the door. 'I suppose,' she said, 'you think it fair to me to speak in whispers to Edna when I am in the room, or you wouldn't do it. How can you expect the child to have any respect for me when you allow her to whisper——'

'Is there anything to eat in the house?'

'You know there is always something to eat in the house.'

'Then will you ring, or shall I?'

'You can't expect servants to sit up all night——'

'Very well; give me the keys, and I will get something for myself.'

Mrs. Sartwell's lips trembled as she folded her work methodically, enclosing needle, thimble, and various paraphernalia of sewing in a bundle, which she placed exactly where it should be in the work-basket. The keys jingled at her waist as she rose.

'I am ready, and always have been, to get you what you want whenever you want it. Perhaps I expect too much, but I think you might ask for it civilly. If you treat your men as you do your wife, it's no wonder they strike.'

Sartwell made no reply, sitting there with his eyes closed until his wife, with a quaver in her voice, told him his supper was ready. There was a plentiful provision, with a choice of beer or wine to drink; for one of Sartwell's weaknesses was the belief that a man, to work well, must eat well. Although his wife did

not approve of this pampering, she nevertheless provided well for him, for is not a woman helpless in such a case? As the man of the house ate in silence, she looked at him once or twice over her sewing, and finally said, pathetically,—

'I am sure Edna was hungry, but she was afraid to say so; you were so gruff with her. One would think that, if you had no feeling for your wife, you would have some for your only daughter.'

Sartwell cut another slice from the cold joint, and transferred it to his plate.

'I am accustomed to it, I hope, by this time; but she is young, and nothing warps the character of the young like uncalled-for harshness and unkindness. You are blind to her real faults, and then you are severe when there is no occasion for severity. What had the child done that you should order her off to bed in that fashion?'

There was a pause for a reply, but no reply came. Mrs. Sartwell was accustomed to this, as she had said, for there is a brutality of silence as well as a brutality of speech, so she scanned her adversary as one does who searches for a joint in the armour where the sword's point may enter. Then she took a firm grasp of the hilt and pressed the blade gently forward. Turning over her sewing, and sighing almost inaudibly to it, she remarked, quietly,—

'As I said to Mrs. Hope when she called——'

'Said to whom?' snapped Sartwell, turning round suddenly.

'Oh, I thought you were never interested in my callers. I suppose I am allowed to have some private friends of my own. Still, if you wish me to sit in the house all day alone, you have but to say so, and I will obey.'

'Don't talk nonsense, if you can help it. What was Mrs. Hope doing here?'

'She was calling on me.'

'Quite so. I think I understand that much. What was her mission? What particular fad was on this time?'

'I should think you would be ashamed to speak like that about your employer's wife, when she did your wife the honour to consult her——'

'About what? That is the point I want to get at.'

'About the strike.'

'Ah!' A glint of anger came into Sartwell's eyes, and his wife looked at him with some uneasiness.

'Mrs. Hope is a woman who goes about doing good. She is much interested in the men at the works, and thinks of calling on their wives and families to see for herself how they live. She thinks, perhaps, something may be done for them.'

'Does she?'

'Yes. She wonders if you are quite patient and tactful with them.'

'And came to find out? You told her, no doubt, that I studied tact from you, and was, therefore, all right so far as that is concerned.'

'I told her the truth,' cried Mrs. Sartwell, hotly.

'Which was——?'

'That you were an obstinate, domineering man, who would brook no opposition.'

'You hit the bull's-eye for once. What did she say?'

'She said she hoped you considered the men's helpless families.'

'And you answered that not having any consideration for my own, it was not likely I would give much thought to the wives and families of the men.'

'I didn't say so, but I thought it.'

'Admirable self-restraint! Now, look here, Sarah, you're playing with fire and haven't the sense to know it. Mrs. Hope is a meddling, hysterical fool, and——'

'You wouldn't dare say that to your employer.'

'Now, such a remark shows that a woman of your

calibre may live for years with a man and not begin to understand him. The trouble is that I shall say that very thing to my employer, as you delight to call him, the moment his wife puts her finger in the pie. Then what follows?'

'You will lose your situation.'

'Exactly. Or to put it more truthfully, I resign—I walk out into the street.'

'You surely would do nothing so foolish.'

'That follows instantly when I am compelled to give Mr. Hope my opinion regarding his domestic relations. Then what will become of your income? Will Mrs. Hope contribute, do you think? Do you aspire to a place on her charity list? Whatever your opinion has been of me, privately held or publicly expressed, you must admit that I have at least provided money enough to keep the house going; and you have surely the sense to appreciate that. You never could see an inch ahead of your nose, or realize that effect follows cause as inevitably as fate. How a woman can describe a man as obstinate and domineering, impatient of all control, and then deliberately wag her tongue to bring about the very interference which, she must know, if she believes what she has said, he will not stand, passes my comprehension. The result of your gossip to-day may be that I shall be looking for another situation—as you call it—to-morrow.'

Mrs. Sartwell had been weeping during the latter part of this harangue.

'It is always I,' she sobbed, 'who am to blame for everything wrong. Your hasty, ungovernable temper is never at fault. If you made me more of a confidante in your affairs—other men consult their wives, better men than you, and richer than you will ever be. Mrs. Hope says that her husband——'

'I don't want to hear any more about Mrs. Hope.'

'You insisted on talking about her. I didn't want

to say anything, but you cross-questioned me till I had to, and now you blame me.'

'Very well, let it rest there. Will you get me a glass of milk, if you please?'

'You are surely not going to drink milk after beer?'

'I claim the liberty of a British subject to drink any mortal thing I choose to drink. Don't let us have an argument over it.'

'But you won't sleep a wink, John, if you do. It's for your own good I speak.'

'Everything is for my own good, Sarah; perhaps that's what makes me so impatient.'

'Well, you know how you are after a bad night.'

'Yes, yes. I think I have earned my bad night, anyhow. Get the milk, or tell me where to get it.'

Mrs. Sartwell always rose when her husband offered to help himself from the larder. She placed the glass of milk at his elbow.

'I've got a number of things to think over,' he said. 'I want to be alone.'

She stood by the table looking at him.

'Good-night, John,' she faltered at last.

'Good-night,' he answered.

She gazed at him reproachfully in silence, but he did not raise his head; so turning at last, with a long-drawn sigh, she left him to his meditations.

Sartwell sat there with deep anxiety on his brow. Silence fell on all the house. At last the master roused himself and turned to the table. He buttered two slices of bread and cut a piece of dainty cake, placing them on a plate with the glass of milk. Lighting a candle and turning out the gas, he set himself to accomplish the acrobatic feat of carrying plate, tumbler, and candle. First, he opened the door inaudibly and kicked off his slippers. Awkwardly laden, he mounted the stairs with the stealthy tread of a burglar, but in spite of his precautions the stairs

creaked ominously in the stillness. He noiselessly entered a room, and, placing the difficult load on the table, softly closed the door. When the light shone on the sleeping girl's face she opened her eyes very wide, then covered them with her hand, laughing a quiet, sleepy little laugh, and buried her face in the white pillow.

'H—s—sh,' said her father.

Instantly she was wide awake.

'I was afraid you were hungry after all,' he whispered.

'I wasn't then, really, but I am now, a little.'

'That's good.' He placed a small round gipsy-table near the bed, and put the plate and glass of milk upon it.

'You knew, of course, when I spoke, that—I merely wanted you to get a long night's rest. You were tired, you know.'

'Oh, I know that, father.'

'Then, good-night, my dear; perhaps it was foolish to wake you up, but you will soon drop off to sleep again.'

'In a minute, and this does look tempting. I just wanted a glass of milk. It's so good of you, father.'

She drew his head down and kissed him.

'I hope you'll sleep well,' she added.

'I'll be sure to.'

At the door he stopped, then, after a moment, whispered cautiously: 'Edna, you'll take the things down in the morning yourself, quietly. The servants, you know—well, they don't like extra trouble sometimes.'

'Yes, father, I understand.'

Sartwell stole silently out of the room like a thief in the night.

CHAPTER IV.

BARNARD HOPE, commonly known as Barney, never quite got over his surprise at finding himself the son of James Hope and Euphemia his wife. James Hope, the junior member of the firm of Monkton and Hope, was an undersized man, with an obvious baldness and an air of constant apology. He seemed to attach a mental reservation to every hesitating opinion he uttered, so that he might instantly call the opinion back if necessary. Meeting him in the street one would take him for a very much bullied, very much underpaid clerk in the City. In his business office he lived in fear of his manager; at home he lived in fear of his wife.

The chief characteristic of Mrs. Hope was uncompromising rigidity. She was a head taller than her husband; and when one met them on the way to church, he had the meek attitude of an unfortunate little boy who had been found doing something naughty, and was being taken to church as a punishment by a just and indignant school-mistress. Mrs. Hope joined in none of the fashionable frivolities of Surbiton, where she lived. She had a mission and a duty towards her fellow-creatures—that is, towards those who were poor, and who could not very well resent her patronage. She had an idea that if all

the well-to-do did their duty, the world would be a brighter and a better place—which is doubtful.

But it was perhaps best, on the whole, that Mrs. Hope had not been intrusted with the task of making the world over again; many interesting features would in that case have been eliminated. Hope, himself, was not an example of unmitigated happiness. The lady always had a number of protégés on hand, whom she afterwards discovered to be undeserving; which discovery caused them to be thrown over for new cases which in turn went bad. She was also constantly in demand by organizations needing members with long purses; but Mrs. Hope had a wonderful talent for managing, which was not always recognized by those with whom she associated. This often led to trouble, older members claiming, as they vulgarly put it, that she wanted to 'run the whole show,' and one outspoken person advised her to ameliorate the condition of her husband's workmen, if she desired fit subjects for her efforts. This remark turned Mrs. Hope's attention to the manufactory of Monkton and Hope, and led to her calling upon Mrs. Sartwell in the neighbouring suburb of Wimbledon.

Now, the son of these two dissimilar but estimable persons ought to have been a solemn prig, whereas he was in fact a boisterous cad. Thus does Nature revel in unexpected surprises.

Barney was a broad-shouldered, good-natured giant, who towered over his shrinking father as the Monument towers over the nearest lamp-post. He was 'hail fellow, well met,' with everybody; and could not shake hands like an ordinary mortal, but must bring down his great paw with an over-shoulder motion as if he were throwing a cricket-ball, and after a resounding thwack of palm on palm, crunch the hand he held until its owner winced. Friends of the young fellow on meeting him got into the habit of placing their hands behind them and saying, 'I'm

quite well, thank you, Barney;' whereupon Barney laughed and smote them on the shoulder, which, though hard to bear, was the less of two evils.

'Boisterous brute,' his comrades said, behind his back; but the energetic shoulder-blow or hand-clasp merely meant that Barney was very glad indeed to meet a friend, and to let the friend know that, although he was very poor and Barney very rich, this circumstance need not make the slightest difference between them.

It is possible that in the Far West, or in the Australian bush, where muscle counts for something, there was a place yawning for Barney; perhaps the place awaited him even in London; but if that were so, fate and Barney's own inclinations removed him as far as possible from it. Barney was an artist; that is to say, he painted, or rather he put certain colours on canvas. For some years Barney had been the amazement of Julian's school in Paris. He had a suite of rooms at the Grand Hotel, and drove to the school in the Rue du Dragon every morning with a coachman and footman; the latter carrying Barney's painting kit, while the former sat in statuesque dignity on the box with his whip at the correct angle.

Of course, the art students were not going to stand that sort of thing; so they closed the gates one day and attacked the young man in a body. Barney at first thought it was fun, for he did not understand the language very well, and his good-natured roar sounded loud over the shrill cries of his antagonists. He reached for them one by one and placed them on the ground horizontally in a heap; then he rolled them over and over, flattening any student who attempted resurrection with a pat of his gigantic paw.

Whatever admiration they may have had for art at Julian's, they certainly evinced a deep respect for muscle, and so left Barney alone after that. He

invited them all to dinner at the Grand Hotel, and they went.

When his meteoric career as an art student in Paris was completed, he set himself up in an immense studio in Chelsea. The studio was furnished regardless of expense; there was everything in it that a studio ought to have: rich hangings and rugs from the East, tigers' skins from India, ancient armour, easels of every pattern, and luxurious lounges covered with stuffs from Persia.

'There,' cried Barney to Hurst Haldiman, with a grand sweep of his hand. 'What do you think of that?'

Haldiman, one of the most gifted students he had met in Paris, had now a garret of his own in London, where he painted when he had time, and did black-and-white work for the magazines and illustrated weeklies to keep himself in money. Barney had invited all his old Parisian friends, one by one, to see his new quarters.

'Wonderful,' said Haldiman. 'I venture to say there is not another studio in London like it.'

'That was my intention,' replied Barney. 'They told me that Sir Richard Daubs had the finest studio in London. I said nothing, but went to work, and here I am. Have you ever seen Daubs's studio, Hurst?'

'No. He is not so friendly as you are, Barney; he has never invited me.'

'Well, I'll get you an invitation, and I want you to tell me candidly what you think of mine as compared with his.'

'Thanks, old man, but don't trouble about an invitation for me. I haven't any time to spare; merely came up here, you know, because we had been in Paris together. Daubs's studio has one great advantage over many others: it contains a man who can paint.'

'Oh yes, Haldiman, that's all right. That's the old Paris wheeze, you know. Ever since I heaped those chaps one on the top of the other, they have revenged themselves by saying I can't paint; but you should be above that sort of thing, Haldiman, you should, really. You see, I'm a plain, straightforward fellow, and I've got what is admitted to be the finest studio in London; but does that make any difference between me and my old friends? Not a bit of it, and the fact that you are sitting there proves it. I'm a born Bohemian; I despise riches, and my very best friends are fellows who haven't a sou-markee. *You* know that, Haldiman.'

Haldiman lit another of Hope's excellent cigarettes. Barney imported them from Egypt himself, and declared that they were the same brand as those which the Khedive smoked, until one of the war correspondents informed him that the Khedive was not a smoker. Then Barney slightly varied the phrase.

'Help yourself, dear boy. You'll find they're not half bad, as cigarettes go. I get them direct, for you can't trust these rascally importers. The Khedive is not a smoker himself; still, he keeps nothing but the best for his guests, and this is the identical brand, as supplied to him.

'Now, about this painting business,' continued Barney. 'I venture to say that there was a time when Daubs was utterly unknown. Very well. Here, also, am I—utterly unknown. The public won't buy my pictures. I don't conceal that fact. Why should I? I sent a picture to the Birmingham Exhibition—I don't say it was great, but I do claim it had individuality. They rejected it!'

'You amaze me!'

'I give you my word of honour they did, Haldiman. Birmingham! Think of that! A town that manufactures nails and gun-barrels.'

'Oh, art in England is going to the dogs,' said Haldiman, dejectedly.

'Now, I don't go so far as to say that. No; I laughed when my little effort came back, with regrets. I said, "I can bide my time," and I can. The people will come to me, Haldiman, you see if they don't.'

'They do already, Barney—those who want to borrow money.'

'Now look here, Hurst, don't throw my beastly cash in my teeth. Am I to blame if I am rich? Do I allow it to make a difference between man and man? We were talking about art, not money.'

'So we were. About your pictures. Go on.'

'I only wanted to point out to you that one must take things philosophically. Now, if Birmingham had rejected one of your pictures it would have depressed you for a week.'

'Birmingham has treated me quite differently, Barney. It has accepted two of mine. Hence my gloom after what you have told me.'

Barney beamed on his visitor. Here was his argument clinched; but he repressed his desire to say, 'I told you so.' Still, he could not allow the occasion to pass without improving it with a little judicious counsel.

'There you are, Haldiman, there you are. Does not the fact that you are accepted of Birmingham make you pause and think?'

'I m staggered. It's a knock-down blow. I'll be in the Academy next.'

'Oh, not so bad as that. You see, Haldiman, you have talent of a certain kind—— '

'Now, Barney, you lay it on too thick. I like flattery, of course, but it must be delicately done. You are gross in your praise.'

'I am not flattering you, Haldiman, 'pon my soul I'm not. Most other fellows would be offended

at what I'm going to say, but you're a sensible man——'

'There you go again.'

'Listen to me. You have a certain talent—technique, perhaps, I should call it; a slight skill in technique.'

'Ah, that's better. Now, go on.'

'You got the praise and the prizes in Paris because of your technique, and that set you on the wrong tack. You are merely doing well what hosts of other men have done well before you. You are down among the ruck. Now, I strive after individuality.'

'You get it, Barney.'

'That's not for me to say; anyhow, individuality and strength are what I want to see in my pictures, and there will by-and-by come a critic with a mind unbiassed enough to recognize these qualities. Then my day will have arrived. You mark my words, I shall found a school.'

'Like Julian's.'

'No, like Whistler's. You know very well what I mean. That's your nasty way of showing you are offended because I'm frank enough to tell you the truth.'

'I suppose none of us like the candid friend, however much we may pretend to. Well, I must be going. I've got some technique to do for one of the magazines.'

'Don't go just yet. I have not half finished. Here is what I have to propose. Give up your room and come with me. You see the great advantage I have over you is that I can wait. If a magazine asked me to do black-and-white work for it I would say, "No, go to those poor devils who must work or starve. I'm working for the future, not for the present." That's what I'd say. Now, I'll give you a bedroom, rent free, and a corner of this studio. It won't cost you a penny—nor your board either. You can paint just

what you like and not what the public demand. Then you will be independent.'

'We have different views about things, Barney. That would seem to me the worst form of dependence. It is very generous of you, but utterly impracticable; besides, you haven't thought of the danger of my becoming a mere copyist of you—a shadow of the new individualist. I couldn't risk that, you know.'

'Better become the shadow of one man than the shadow of many, which you are now.'

'Perhaps; but each must fight his own battle in his own way. Good-bye, Barney.'

Haldiman went downstairs, not cheered as much as might have been expected by Hope's overflowing good-nature and generosity. He met Barney's mother on the stairs, who gave him a head-to-foot glance of evident disapproval. She did not admire the set with which her son had thrown in his lot, and feared the influence on him would not be beneficial.

'Oh, Mater!' cried Barney, when she entered, 'I did not expect you to-day. How did you find the place?'

His mother raised her eye-glasses, and surveyed the room in silence.

'So this is the studio, Barnard,' she said at last. 'I don't think much of it. Why is it all untidy like this, or haven't you had time to get it in order yet?'

'This is the kind of thing we artists go in for, Mater. It is as much in order as it ever will be.'

'Then I don't like it. Why could you not have had a man in to lay one carpet as it should be laid? These rugs all scattered about in this careless way trip one up so. What's this old iron for?'

'That's armour, Mater.'

'Oh, is it? I don't see how any one can do useful work in a room like this; still, I suppose it is good enough to paint in. I found the place easily enough. Trust a neighbourhood to know where there is any

extra foolishness going on. Of course, you have been cheated in everything you bought. But that's neither here nor there. I came to talk with you about the business.'

'What business, Mater?'

'What business? *The* business, of course. Your father's business and yours, for I hope the time will come when you will take more interest in it than you do now. The men, it seems, talk of going on strike.'

'Foolish beggars! What are they going to do that for, and what do you expect me to do? Not to talk to the men, I hope, for I detest the working-man. He's an ass usually, otherwise he wouldn't work for the wages he gets. Then he spends what he does make on bad beer, and goes home and beats his wife. I can't reason with the working-man, you know, Mater.'

'No, I don't suppose you can. I sometimes doubt whether you can reason with anybody. It is because the working-man labours, that you can idle away your time in a place like this. There are many deserving characters among the working classes, although they are often difficult to find. The men have made some demands which Sartwell, the manager, won't even listen to. It seems to me that he is not treating them fairly. He should, at least, hear what they have to say; and if their demands do not cost the firm anything, he should grant them.'

'Mater,' cried the young man, with enthusiasm, 'what a head for business you have!'

'I am of a family which became rich through having heads for business,' replied the lady, with justifiable pride. 'Now, what I want you to do is to see this man Sartwell—he will pay attention to you, because he knows that in time you will be his master, and so he will be civil to you.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' said Barney, doubtfully. 'I imagine he thinks me rather an ass, you know.'

'Well, now is your opportunity for showing him that you are not, if he has the impertinence to think such a thing. You had better see him at his own house, and not at the Works—here is his address. Tell him to receive the men and compromise with them. He is to make concessions that are unimportant, and thus effect a compromise. A little tact is all that is required.'

'From me, or from Sartwell?'

'From both of you. I expect tact from you because you are my son.'

'But why doesn't father talk to Sartwell? I know nothing of the business and father does; it seems to be entirely in his line, don't you know.'

'Your father, Barnard, is a timorous man, and he actually is afraid of his manager. He thinks it is interference, and doesn't want to meddle, so he says; as if a man were meddling in looking after his own affairs! He fears Sartwell will resign, but that kind of man knows where his own interest lies. I'll risk his resigning, and I want you to see him at his house, for it is of no use bothering your father about these things.'

'I don't like the job, Mater; it does look like interference.'

Mrs. Hope again raised her eye-glasses by their long tortoise-shell handle, and once more surveyed the studio.

'This must have cost you a good deal of money, Barnard,' she said, impressively.

'It did,' admitted the young man.

'I suppose I shall soon have to be writing another cheque for you. For how much shall I make it?'

'It is such a pity to trouble you so often, Mater,' replied the young man, 'that, perhaps, we had better say three hundred.'

'Very well,' said the Mater, rising. 'I will have it ready for you when you come to Surbiton, after

having seen Sartwell at Wimbledon. It is on your way, you know.'

'All right, Mater. But you mustn't blame me if I don't succeed. I'll do my best; but Sartwell's an awkward beggar to deal with.'

'All I ask of you, Barnard, is that you shall do your best,' answered the lady, rising.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Mrs. Hope departed, Barney sat down on a luxurious divan in his studio and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. 'I may as well have that cheque as soon as possible,' he said to himself. 'It is of no use delaying important matters; besides, delay might injure the scheme the Mater has on her mind. What a blessing it is father asks me not to mention the cheques he gives me. Between the two you manage to rub along, Barney, my boy. Well, here goes for Wimbledon!'

The young man arrayed himself with some care, jumped into a hansom, and was driven to Sloane Square Station, where, in due time, a deliberate train came along that ultimately landed him in Wimbledon.

If Barney had been a man of deep thought, or one experienced in the ways of working people, or had been able to reason by induction, he would have arrived at the fact that there was not the slightest chance of finding Mr. Sartwell in his house at that hour of the day. It must not be supposed that Barney was an unthinking person, however; for when the servant informed him that Mr. Sartwell was never at home except in the evening or early morning, Barney at once accused himself mentally of heedlessness in having come all the way from Chelsea to Wimbledon to learn so self-evident a fact. He thus

admitted to himself his own ability to have reasoned the matter out, had his mind been unobscured by the shadow of a coming cheque.

Still, he was not quick at grasping unexpected details; and he stood at the door hardly knowing what to do next, while the servant watched him with obvious distrust, wondering whether he came to sell something or merely to ask for a subscription; however, the fact that he was keeping a hansom waiting at the gate told in his favour, so she broke the silence by saying—

'Any message, sir?'

He ignored this question, which raised him still higher in the servant's estimation, and ventured the perfectly accurate opinion—

'He will not be home for some hours, I suppose?'

'No, sir.'

Barney pondered for a while, and suddenly delivered himself of a resolution that did credit to his good sense.

'Then I won't wait,' he said.

'What name shall I say, sir?' asked the maid.

'Oh, it's of no importance. I will call again; still, here is my card. I am the son of Mr. Hope, one of the proprietors of the Works.'

The maid took the card, and Mrs. Sartwell appeared in the hall, almost as if she had been listening to the words of the speaker—which, of course, she had a perfect right to do, as one generally wishes to know who calls at one's front door.

'Did I hear you say that you were Mr. Hope?' she asked.

'I am his son, madam,' said Barney, modestly, and with that politeness which he had learned in Paris.

'Won't you come in? I'm sorry my husband is not at home. Is it on account of the strike you come? I feel very anxious. Your mother called yesterday, and we had a long conversation about it.'

'Yes, the Mater takes a great interest in the working-man, although I can't say I do myself. I merely wished to have an informal chat with Mr. Sartwell on the situation, and that is why I called at the house rather than at the Works.'

Barney stepped into the hall and kept his hat in his hand to show he had a hansom waiting. He had no intention of staying more than a moment or two. He thought it best to have something to tell his mother about his visit to Wimbledon, for she was a relentless cross-questioner, and if he could have a conversation to report, she might take the will for the deed and give him the cheque.

The door of the drawing-room was thrown open, and, when the two entered, they found Edna Sartwell sitting there in a deep chair, reading a book with such interest that she evidently had not heard a word of the colloquy at the door. She rose in some confusion, colouring deeply as she saw a stranger come in with her step-mother. The latter said nothing to the girl, but directed a glance at her that, speaking as plainly as words, told her to leave the room.

Barney's first thought on seeing Edna was that she was about to escape, and his second, that this desertion must be diplomatically prevented. Barney's great burden in life, so he often told his friends, was that the young ladies of England were in the habit of throwing themselves at his head, which remark caused Haldiman once to say they had a quick eye for his weakest point of defence. Now here was a 'stunning' girl, to use Barney's own phrase about her, who was actually about to walk out of the room without casting a second glance at him. A young man always likes the unusual.

'Not your daughter, Mrs. Sartwell?' said Barney, in his most winning manner.

'My step-daughter,' answered the lady, coldly.

Ah, I thought you could not have a grown-up

daughter,' murmured Barney, delicately. He always found this particular kind of compliment very successful with ladies well past middle age, and in this case his confidence was not misplaced.

'Do not let me drive you away, Miss Sartwell,' he continued. 'I am Barnard Hope,' he added, seeing that Mrs. Sartwell did not intend to introduce him, 'and I called to see your father and talk with him regarding the strike. So, you know, it is a matter which interests us all, and I beg of you to join in the conference.'

The moment her father and the strike were mentioned, he saw the attention of the girl was instantly aroused, for she paused and looked inquiringly at her step-mother. That perplexed lady was in a quandary. She did not wish to offend Mrs. Hope's son, and she did not want her step-daughter to remain in the room. She hesitated, and was lost.

'Pray let me offer you a chair,' said Barney, with that gallantry which he always found irresistible. 'And you, Miss Sartwell. Now we will have a comfortable informal chat, which I know will be of immense assistance in my talk with Mr. Sartwell, for I confess I am a little afraid of him.'

Edna opened her eyes at this; she had several times heard people say they stood in awe of her father, and never could understand why.

Mrs. Sartwell sat bolt upright and folded her hands on her lap, frowning at her step-daughter when she got a chance unseen by Barney. She did not at all like the turn events had taken, but she saw no way of interfering without seeming to be rude to her guest.

'You see,' chirruped Barney, 'the Mater takes a great interest in the working-man; so do I.' He thought this noble sentiment would appeal to Edna Sartwell. 'I think we all—we all—as it were—should feel a certain responsibility, don't you know. You see what I mean, Mrs. Sartwell?'

'Certainly. It does you great credit, Mr. Hope,' replied the lady appealed to, although she uttered the phrase with some severity, as if it were an aspersion.

'Oh, not at all. I suppose it was born in me. I think it natural for all rightly brought up persons to take a deep interest in their fellow-creatures. Don't you think so, Miss Sartwell?'

'Yes,' said Edna, faintly, without looking up.

'For workmen *are* our fellow-creatures, you know,' cried Barney, with all the enthusiasm of a startling discovery.

'Am I my brother's keeper?' said Mrs. Sartwell, in gloomy tones.

'Quite so, quite so,' assented Barney, who took the remark as original. 'I couldn't have stated the case better if I had thought all day about it. Now, the Mater imagined that perhaps Mr. Sartwell would consent to meet the men and talk it over, making, let us say, some trifling concessions, and then everything would be lovely. You see what I mean?'

'It seems a most reasonable proposal,' said Mrs. Sartwell, with a sigh; 'but my opinion is of no value, especially in my own house.'

'Oh, don't say that, Mrs. Sartwell. I am sure every one must value your opinion most highly—every one who has the privilege of hearing it. I assure you I do. Now, what do you think, Miss Sartwell?"

The young man beamed on the girl in his most fascinating manner; but his charming facial expression was in a measure lost, for Edna was looking at the carpet, apparently perplexed.

'I think,' she said, at last, 'that father, who spends nearly all his time among the men, must understand the situation better than we do. He has had a great deal of experience with them, and, as I know, has given much thought to the difficulty; so, it seems to me, our advice may not be of any real value to him.'

Barney could scarcely repress a long whistle. So

this was how the land lay. This demure miss actually had an opinion of her own, and was plainly going to stand with her father against the field. Heretofore everybody had always agreed with Barney, excepting, of course, those rascally students, who were no respecters of persons; and more especially had all women agreed with him, therefore this little bit of opposition, so decorously expressed, had a new and refreshing flavour. The wind had shifted; he must trim his sails to suit the breeze.

'There, Miss Sartwell, you have touched the weak point in our case. Just what I said to the Mater. "Mr. Sartwell's on the spot," said I, "and he ought to know." Almost your very words, Miss Sartwell.'

An ominous cloud rested on Mrs. Sartwell's brow.

'Surely,' she said, severely, 'the owners of a business should have something to say about the way it is to be conducted.'

'The tendency of modern times,' cried Barney, airily, waving his hand, 'appears to be entirely in the opposite direction, my dear madam. It is getting to be that, whoever *has* a say in a business, the owners shall have the least. And I am not sure but this is, to a certain extent, logical. I have often heard my father say that Mr. Sartwell was the real maker of the business. Why, then, should he be interfered with?'

Edna looked up gratefully at the enthusiastic young man, for she not only liked the sentiments he was beginning to express, but she liked the manly ring in his voice. Barney had frequently found this tone to be very taking, especially with the young and inexperienced, and he knew that he appeared at his best when assuming it, if none of his carping comrades were present. He could even work himself up into a sturdy state of indignation, if his audience were sympathetic, and he were free from the blighting influence of the pessimistic young men he met in Bohemia.

'And now, Miss Sartwell, I'll tell you what I propose. Have a talk with your father; then, if Mr. Sartwell will allow me, I will call again, and I can judge, from what you say, whether it will be worth while troubling Mr. Sartwell with our advice. You see, we all have the same object in view; we wish to help Mr. Sartwell if we can. If we can't, then there is no harm done. You see what I mean?'

Mrs. Sartwell rather grudgingly assented to this. Edna said nothing.

'You see, ladies, I am an artist; a painter of pictures. I work, as it were, in the past and in the future. I feel that I do not belong to the present, and these little details I know I ought to leave to those who understand how to deal with them. I told the Mater so. But whether we are able to help Mr. Sartwell or not, you must allow me to thank you for a very charming interview. My studio is in Chelsea, and is said to be the finest in London; but, of course, I care nothing about that; to me it is merely my workshop. But there are relaxations even in artistic life, and every Tuesday afternoon, from three o'clock till five, I am at home to my friends. I expect the Mater to receive my guests, and you must promise to come, Mrs. Sartwell, will you not? I will send you cards, and you are sure to meet some nice people. May I count on you? I know the Mater will be pleased.'

'I shall be very happy to accept your invitation,' said Mrs. Sartwell, softening under the genial influence of the young man.

'And you too, Miss Sartwell?'

Edna looked somewhat dubiously at her stepmother.

'You will bring Miss Sartwell with you, will you not?' persisted the young man.

'I am always glad to do anything that may add to Edna's pleasure,' said Mrs. Sartwell, a trifle less cordially, 'but it must be as her father says.'

'Then you will use your influence with him, Miss Sartwell, won't you, and get him to consent? I am sure he will not refuse if you care to come.'

'I should like very much to come,' said Edna.

'Then we will look on it as settled.'

When the young man stepped into his waiting hansom, he said to himself: "Ah, Barney, my boy, you light on your feet as usual. What a lovely girl! And a mind of her own, too, if she is so shy. Who would ever have suspected grim old Sartwell of having such a pretty daughter? I must persuade the Mater to come off that particular hobby-horse of hers, for it is easy to see the girl doesn't want any one to interfere with her father. If I can bring the Mater round, and get the cheque too, I'm a diplomatist.'

CHAPTER VI

FROM Wimbledon to Surbiton is comparatively but a step. An enterprising train, bent on accomplishing the feat, can cover the distance in seven or eight minutes, and even the slowest of 'locals' takes but twelve. Barney was an energetic young man, and where a cheque was concerned, knew the danger of delay; so he resolved, being in the neighbourhood, to go to Surbiton, see his mother, and settle the business. The young man often reassured himself by saying inwardly that he was no fool, and the opportunity afforded him to meditate on the situation, as he paced up and down No. 3 platform waiting for the train, enabled him to formulate a course of action.

Barney had a well-defined mental process by which he arrived at any plan of procedure. 'The great thing, my boy,' he used to say, 'is to know exactly what you want, and then go for it.' In going for it, the young fellow trampled on anything that came in his path; truth, for example. His one object was success—the kind that succeeds. Having attained that, he was careless of the means.

In this instance, what he wanted was to prevent any interference with Sartwell, and he knew that if he boldly opposed his mother's scheme, such opposition would inevitably bring about the meddling which he desired to avoid, at the same time placing himself in her bad books; and this was financially undesirable.

'It will take a bit of thinking,' said Barney to himself, thus showing that he correctly estimated the difficulties of the situation, and realized the shortness of the distance between Wimbledon and Surbiton.

Surbiton is a most attractive Surrey suburb with an excellent service of trains. The houses are large, detached, and of the class known in the estate agents' vocabulary as 'desirable.' Stockbrokers in the City are attracted thither as much by the rapid train service as by the desirable residences. The rich and retired tradesman and the manufacturer in a large way, have given the place an exclusiveness which it could never have attained had it been a mere resort of noblemen, or a place for the housing of the working classes.

It is the rich and retired tradesman who has given England its reputation as a cold and dignified nation. Nothing can compare with a first-class compartment from Surbiton—'Vauxhall and Waterloo only'—for frigid exclusiveness. Sometimes an unfortunate duke or marquis, coming from his estates in the south-west, chances upon the Surbiton contingent, and makes an innocent and friendly remark, to be frozen into silence by the icy stare of the other five occupants of the compartment.

Surbiton, to a stranger, has the look of a seaside place. Some of the streets are broad, and divided by narrow, railed-in parks. There are benches here and there, and trees everywhere; while an assembly hall in the centre of the town, and a sort of marine parade along the river, with a band-stand, and military concerts on certain evenings during the summer, give to this charming suburb the air of a coast resort, lacking only the long, spidery, cast-iron pier, which Surbiton may yet build over the river into the Hampton Court grounds, where in spring the waters lie like a broad, yellow ocean.

When that pier is built the charge for admission

will doubtless be double Brighton price, for Surbiton is prone to attest its exclusiveness in a manner that appeals to the financial imagination. It is proud of the fact that its local rates are high, and that a first-class season ticket costs more than to any other place an equal distance from London.

The Hope residence was a large, square, yellow house, rather old-fashioned—'an imposing mansion,' was the phrase that caught Mrs. Hope's eye in the *Times*, before she induced her husband to buy it—and it stood in extensive, well-wooded grounds. Barney drove up to it in one of the open victorias which stand for hire at the station, a class of vehicle that adds to the seaside appearance of Surbiton.

Telling the man to wait, he sprang up the steps and knocked, for there was nothing so modern as a bell at the front door. He found his mother in the drawing-room, and with her Lady Mary Fanshaw, who had driven over from her father's country place, which lay in the direction of Dorking. Lady Mary was a nice girl, rather shy, who blushed prettily when Barney came in, and had a great admiration for the young man's hitherto unappreciated artistic talents, liking a painter better than a manufacturer. Her father, having ascertained definitely that Barney's possession of a studio would in no way interfere with his ultimate coming into the proprietorship of the remunerative factory, made no objection to the acquaintanceship between the Hope family and his own.

'How d'ye do, Lady Mary?' cried the young man, shaking hands with her.

'How are you, Mater?' he added to his mother, kissing her on the cheek.

'Barnard,' said the elder lady, with a touch of severity in her tone, 'I did not expect to see you in Surbiton so soon. I thought you would attend to the business I spoke of.'

'It's all been attended to, Mater. I don't let the

grass grow under my feet—not that it's a good day for grass either,' continued the young man, cheerfully, warming his hands at the fire. 'Beastly weather,' he remarked to Lady Mary, who assented to the terse statement.

'Yes, Mater, my motto is: What is worth doing is worth doing quickly. Speedily done is twice done—I think there's a proverb to that effect, don't you know. If there's not, there ought to be.'

Lady Mary rose to leave the room, as mother and son had evidently something to discuss together.

'Sit down, child,' said Mrs. Hope. 'It is nothing private. The men at the Works talk of going on strike. The manager is a stubborn, unyielding man, given to browbeating even his employers——'

'Bullying, I call it,' interrupted Barney, who now stood with his back to the fire, his feet well apart on the hearthrug. His mother went on calmly, without noticing her son's interpolation.

'So it seems to me that such a man, utterly lacking in tact, might not, perhaps, be mindful of the feelings of those under him. We all have our duties towards the working class; a fact which many, alas! appear to forget.'

Lady Mary said softly, with her eyes cast down, that this was indeed the case.

'So you saw Mr. Sartwell, Barnard?'

'Oh yes, I saw Sartwell and had a talk with some of the men—with the—ah—ringleaders, don't you know.'

'You mean the leaders, Barnard.'

'Yes, something of that sort. I don't pretend to understand the working-man, you know, but there's lots of sense in what they say. They know what they want.'

'Did you find Mr. Sartwell obdurate?'

'Oh, bless you, no, Mater. Sartwell's the most reasonable of men.'

'Indeed? It never occurred to me to place him in that category.'

'Don't you make any mistake about Sartwell, Mater; you won't find him stand in your way at all. He's perfectly willing to do whatever you want done. "Barney, my boy," he said to me, when I told him what you thought about this trouble—"Barney," says he, "after all is said and done, it's the women's affair more than ours."'

'The women's affair!' said Mrs. Hope, drawing herself severely up. 'Do I understand you to mean, Barnard, that the man was referring to Mrs. Monkton and myself?'

'Well, Mater, you see we were talking freely together as man to man—and—hang it all, you know, it *is* your affair and Mrs. Monkton's, more than old Monkton's and father's. I don't suppose they care so very much.'

Mrs. Hope slowly raised her glasses to her eyes and stared at her son, who was looking at the hearth-rug, now resting his weight on his toes and then coming down on his heels.

'I haven't the least idea what you are talking about, Barnard.'

'I am talking about the proposed strike, Mater; about the demands of the men.'

'Requests, my son. The men request an audience with Mr. Sartwell, and he refuses it, as if he were Prime Minister.'

'That's just what I said to Sartwell. "Sartwell," said I, "you're high-handed with the men." He admitted it, but held that if he had a conference with them, no good would be accomplished unless he acceded to their dem—requests.'

'He could compromise—he could make some concessions—and then everything would go smoothly again. He has no tact.'

'Quite so, quite so. But you see the men want

only one thing, not several. They are perfectly logical about it. I had a talk with them, and they were very much gratified to hear that you were on their side. There will be no trouble with them in future if Sartwell is only reasonable. They look at it like this: they work ten hours a day, and get on an average a pound a week—or—ah—something like that—I forget the exact amount, although they had it in shillings and pence. Now, father and Monkton work four or five hours a day, not very hard either, and go to Switzerland in the summer and Algiers in the winter, yet they draw twenty thousand pounds a year each out of the business. This, the men claim to be unjust, and, of course, I quite agree with them. It's outrageous, and I said so. Well, the men are prepared to do the most generous things. In order to compromise, they will allow the partners ten times what the real workers get; Monkton and father are each to draw five hundred pounds a year out of the business, and the forty thousand pounds are to be divided among the workers. I thought that it was an exceedingly liberal proposal, and I told them so.'

During this able, if mythical, exposition of the workmen's views, Mrs. Hope gazed at her son with ever increasing amazement. When he had concluded, she was standing up, apparently speechless, with an ominous frown on her brow. Lady Mary looked with timid anxiety from one to the other. There seemed to be a sweet reasonableness in the young man's argument, and yet something hopelessly wrong about the proposition.

'Five hundred pounds a year!—to *me*!' cried Mrs. Hope, at last.

'Well—to father, technically—same thing, of course.'

'Five hundred a year! Barnard, if any one had told me an hour ago that you were a fool, I—— Five hundred a year! How can people exist on five hundred a year?'

Barney looked reproachfully at his mother. He was evidently hurt.

'That's just the way Sartwell talks; and I suppose he thinks I'm a fool too, merely because I'm trying to understand the labour problem. It seems to me that if a workman with twelve children to support can live on fifty pounds a year, an elderly pair with but one child, and he about to make a fortune in painting, could get along on ten times that amount.'

'Oh, I've no patience with you, Barnard.'

'And then Sartwell says: "Look at the capital invested!"'

'Certainly. He is perfectly right, and any one with a grain of sense would see that. Thousands and thousands of pounds have been expended on the buildings and in the development of the business. The workmen never think of that—nor you either, it appears.'

'You see, Mater, it's out of my line. But what Sartwell said about investment made me think.'

'Think!' exclaimed his mother with withering contempt.

'Yes,' continued Barney, placidly; 'so I went to the workmen to see what *they* had to say about it. They said at once that the capital had been refunded over and over again. I went back to Sartwell to see if this were true, and it *was* true. Well, then——'

'What then?'

'Under the circumstances it seemed to me that the workmen had made a most magnanimous proposal. If a man would paint a picture for me which I could sell for five hundred pounds, and he was content to take fifty for it and leave me the other four hundred and fifty, I should think him the most generous of men.'

'Stop talking nonsense, please. Is Sartwell going to receive the men?'

'I suppose so.'

'Then you must instantly go back to the City and tell him he is to do nothing of the sort.'

'But, Mater,' protested the young man. He looked uneasily round the room and saw that Lady Mary had slipped away unperceived, into the conservatory.

'Don't talk. You've done enough harm already. Try and undo it.'

'But, I say! It's rather rough on me, Mater. When you promised me a cheque for three hundred, I didn't imagine I should have to see old Sartwell a second time, and take back all I said. He *will* think me an ass.'

'He thinks it already. But it doesn't matter what he thinks; it is what he does that you have to deal with. You must see him at once, and stop this nonsense about a conference.'

Barney shook his head dolefully.

'I don't see how I can face him again, Mater. I'd rather lose the three hundred pound cheque.'

'The cheque has nothing to do with the question. I should hope you are not attending to this for the three hundred pounds. But I'll write you a cheque for five hundred if that will satisfy you. Then I hope to hear no more about five hundred a year. Be consistent at least, Barnard.'

'Thanks, Mater, I'll try. And while you are writing out the cheque I'll have a word with Lady Mary.'

'Very well,' said his mother, rising. The request did not seem to displease her. So Barney went to find Lady Mary, which apparently was not a difficult task.

When the two returned, Barney was wonderfully bright notwithstanding his long discussion.

'I was afraid I was in the way,' said Lady Mary, addressing Mrs. Hope, modestly. 'I don't know much about work-people.'

'The labour question,' interposed Barney, 'is an

exceedingly intricate one, and I am afraid I don't quite understand it in all its bearings myself, but it's most interesting, I assure you, most interesting. I'm a labouring man myself now. I've got my studio all fitted up, and I work like a—let's see, is it a Turk or a nigger?'

'I think a nailer is the simile you want.'

'Very likely. I don't suppose a Turk works if he can help it. Oh, by the way, Lady Mary, I have 'At Homes' at my studio every Tuesday, from three till five. I wish you would come. Get your father to bring you. I want a real live lord, don't you know, to—well, to give tone to the gathering.'

Lady Mary laughed.

'I should like very much to come. I was never in a studio since I had my portrait painted. I'll ask my father; but he doesn't go out very often.'

'Oh, I know you can get him to come; so that's a promise.'

In the hall, his mother handed Barney a cheque.

'Be sure you go at once to Sartwell,' she said, 'and see that you don't bungle the business a second time.'

And yet the poor boy had merely pretended that her former orders had been carried out! Barney made no remark about the inconsistency of woman; he kissed her on both cheeks, as a dutiful son should, and departed.

CHAPTER VII

IN almost any country except England, the name by which the evil-smelling *cul-de-sac* off Light Street was known, might be supposed to have been given to it by some cynical humorist. It was called Rose Garden Court. As there is a reason for almost everything in this world, the chances are that, once upon a time, a garden bloomed there, and roses probably flourished in it. The entrance to the court was through an archway, over which, on the Light Street side, was the name of the court. At the right hand of this tunnel stood the Rose and Crown, locally known as the 'pub.,' and the door of the jug and bottle department opened into the passage, which was convenient for the inhabitants of the court. On the left of the archway there was a second-hand clothing shop, the wares, which were, so to speak, exceedingly second-hand, hanging in tattered festoons about the door. A street lamp stood at the edge of the pavement opposite the entrance to the court, and threw its rays under the archway, which somewhat feeble illumination was supplemented by a gas-jet over the door of the jug and bottle department. At the blind end of Rose Garden Court there was another lamp-post. The court was unevenly paved with large slabs of stone, sloppy as a rule, from the overflow of a tap which supplied the inhabitants with water.

The court was walled about by five-story buildings; and in the oblong well formed by these rather dilapidated edifices the air hung dank and heavy, laden with many smells. Breezes blowing over London from the south, or the north, or the west, produced no movement of the noxious air in Rose Garden Court. 'Come out,' the gale from the Surrey hills might cry as it whistled merrily over the housetops, 'come out, and give the people a chance to breathe,' but there was no answering rustle in the court: the air there was silent and sullen, as if it had taken its temper from the inhabitants of the place.

Sometimes, in early spring, the insistent east wind roared boisterously through the tunnel, catching the mephitic atmosphere unawares and flinging it headlong over the roofs, filling the court with a biting whirlwind, scattering loose bits of paper and rags skywards; but the inhabitants did not like it. They closed their windows, shivered, and wished the gale would cease. Next day the air would settle down again quietly, absorb its odours once more, and then everybody felt that things were as they should be.

The court was a property that paid handsomely. No one residing there knew who owned the buildings or the ground. A man collected the room rents promptly in advance; and he had once told the landlord of the Rose and Crown that the court was more lucrative as an investment than if it had been situated in the Grosvenor Square district. The owner was popularly supposed to have farmed the property to a company, and the rent-collector represented this organization. The company could not be expected to spend money on repairs, the owner could not be reached, and apart from all that, the rooms were in constant demand, so, if a tenant did not like the arrangement, he could get out; there were a dozen others ready to take his place.

The people who lived in this human warren were not criminals. Most of them did something useful for a living. Criminals, when convicted, are housed in a much more sanitary manner; and they are sure of enough to eat, which the denizens of the court were not. If any prison in the kingdom were as fetid as Rose Garden Court, the great heart of the nation would be stirred with wrath, and some wretch in authority would feel the lash of righteous public scorn.

The court was merely representative of the home of the British working-man in the wisest, largest, proudest, most wealthy city in the world, at the end of the nineteenth century—after a thousand years, more or less, of progress. Some homes of the working-man are better, but then some are worse; for we must never forget that we have the artisans' improved dwellings amongst us. The occupants of the improved dwellings are fenced about with restrictions; but in the court was freedom—freedom to come and go as you liked, freedom to get drunk, freedom to loaf or work, freedom to starve.

The personal predilections of the courtites were much the same as those of *habitués* of first-class West-End clubs. They liked to drink and gamble. The 'pub.' was at the entrance; and there, or at the barber's shop, they could place a little on a horse of which they knew nothing. One of the advantages of a free country is that a man may get quite as drunk on beer as he can on champagne, and at a much less cost. The results are wonderfully similar.

It is popularly believed that a policeman in Piccadilly is kinder to a client in a dress-coat than a fellow-officer on Waterloo Road is to a man in moleskin. Rose Garden Court had little trouble with the police, although the court—especially the feminine portion of it—looked somewhat askance at the force. All a policeman asked of a drunken dweller was, that if he wanted to fight he should fight in the

court, and not in a busy thoroughfare like Light Street.

The wives of the combatants usually took charge of them before the battle had been fought to a finish; and sometimes a tall policeman watched over the separation of temporary foes, saying little unless one of the fighters resisted the wife who was vociferously shoving him towards his own doorway. Then the officer would say, 'Come, now, my man, none of that'; whereupon, strangely enough, it was the woman who resented the officer's interference for her protection; though, when her man proceeded to abuse a member of the force also, she quickly told him to shut his mouth, prefixing to the noun an adjective which was at once sanguinary and descriptive.

Often a stalwart policeman would take by the scruff of the neck an inhabitant of the court who was staggering along Light Street, filling the air with melody or defiance, and walk him rapidly down the street, the man's legs wabbling about uncertainly as if he were a waxwork automaton, until they were opposite the entrance of the place. Then, having received the required impetus from the officer, the man shot under the archway, and was presumably taken care of when he got inside; anyhow, once in the court he could not get out again except by the way he had entered; and few ever became drunk enough to forget that there was always a policeman in the neighbourhood. The thrust under the archway was merely the friendly Light Street way of doing the Piccadilly act of placing a man tenderly in a cab and telling the driver where to go. Few were ever actually arrested in the Light Street district; and their conduct had to be particularly flagrant to bring them to this last resort of the force.

Along Light Street came Marston, with the elastic, springy, energetic step of a young man in good health, who takes this world seriously and believes there is

something to be done in it. He paused for a moment opposite the Rose and Crown, and nodded to some men who were lounging there.

'Are you all going to the meeting to-night?' he asked.

One shook his head, another shrugged his shoulders; it was evident, at a glance, that none of them had any interest in the meeting while the 'pub.' remained open.

'It's important,' said Marston. 'The committee reports to-night, and "strike or no strike" will likely be put to vote. You are not in favour of a strike, surely? Then come along and vote against it.'

'I dunno' 'bout that,' said one, removing his pipe. 'Strike pay is as good as marster's pay, an' less work to get it. I could do with a bit of an 'oliday.'

'Strike pay may be as good as master's while it lasts, but it won't last,' rejoined Marston.

'When it gives out we'll go back to work,' returned the man. The others laughed.

'Some of you won't get back,' said Marston. 'That's always the way after a strike. Better keep a good job while we have it.'

'Oh, I could do with a bit of an 'oliday,' repeated the spokesman of the 'pub.' crowd, indifferently.

'Good heavens!' cried Marston, indignantly, 'if you take no more interest in your condition than that, how can you ever expect to better it?'

'Well, I thort,' answered the other, good-naturedly, 'when I sees you a-comin' along, as 'ow you'd better it by arstin' us to have a drop o' beer with you.'

'You're muddled with beer already,' said the young man, shortly, as he turned and disappeared up the court.

The crowd smoked on in silence for some minutes after he had left them.

'Cocky young chap, that,' said one at last, jerking his pipe over his shoulder in the direction Marston had gone.

'Oh, 'e knows a bit, 'e does,' remarked another, sarcastically.

There was a longer pause, when the spokesman, who had been ruminating over the matter, said—

'Wot d'ye s'y t' 'avin' another pint insoide? Then we go t' th' meetin' and wote for th' stroike. Larn 'im a lesson. I like 'is impidence, I do. Tork 'bout muddlin', we'll show 'oo's muddled.'

This was unanimously agreed to as illuminating the situation. It is, perhaps, a pity that Marston did not know the result of his brief conversation with his fellow-workmen. He was young, and had to learn many things. He did not know that the desire for improving one's condition is not at all universal; and that even where there may be the germ of a desire, people do not wish to be dragooned into bettering themselves. Tact, as Mrs. Hope might have told him, goes further than good intentions. A glass of beer and a friendly smite on the shoulder would have got him several votes against the strike. As it was, he had merely strengthened the hands of 'that ass Gibbons,' from making the mistake of supposing that the average human being is actuated by reason.

Meanwhile the young man had passed under the archway and up the court, until he came to doorway No. 3. The hall and the five pairs of grimy stairs were only less public than the court, which in its turn was only less public than Light Street, because fewer feet trod thereon. He ascended the first flight of stairs and paused at one of the doors on the landing. From within came the droning notes of a harmonium, and Marston forbore to knock as he listened to the sound. A slatternly woman came down the second flight with a water-jug in her hand. She stopped, on seeing a stranger standing there, and listened to the music also. The dirge which was being played did not soothe whatever savageness there was within the

breast of the woman, for she broke out against the inmates of the room.

'Oh yes,' she cried; 'fine goings-on for the likes of them. A harmonyum, if you please. 'Evin save us, we ain't good enough for the likes o' 'im. A harmonyum! In Garden Court! No good can come o' 'stravagance like that. Wot's 'e, I'd like to know? Bah!'

The woman, with a wave of her hand, expressed her contempt for such goings-on, and departed down the stairs with her jug. Her husband spent his spare cash at the 'pub.,' as a man should, and not in such vanities as a second-hand musical instrument. She had, very properly, no patience with extravagance.

Marston rapped when the playing ceased, and Joe Braunt himself came to the door.

'Come in, my lad,' he said, cordially, and Marston went in.

A tall girl, who might have been fourteen, or sixteen, or eighteen, rose from a chair at the harmonium. She was pale and thin, with large, pathetic eyes which gave a melancholy beauty to her face. 'How are you, Jessie?' said Marston, shaking hands with her. 'Is the cough any better?'

'I think it's always about the same,' replied the girl.

'It is hard to get better in this hole,' said her father, gruffly.

Braunt spoke with the accent of a Yorkshireman. He was a man who in stature and build did credit to his county; and it was difficult to believe that the slender girl was his daughter. However much Joe Braunt's neighbours disapproved of his putting on airs and holding himself and his slim useless daughter above their betters, they took good care not to express their opinions in his hearing, for he was a rough, masterful man, taciturn and gloomy, whose blow was readier than his speech; not only prompt, but effective. The

whole court was afraid of him, and it acted on the principle of letting sleeping dogs lie.

The woman with the jug in her hand had good cause for resentment against Joe Braunt. She had been getting her man home one evening from the 'pub.,' with difficulty, and in spite of many breakings away on his part. She had succeeded in pushing and hauling him as far as the first landing, when he—overcome by a sudden realization of her unnecessary cruelty, in dragging him from the brilliantly lighted public bar, filled with jollity, gin, and good comradeship, to the dismal back-room, two flights up, with nothing but her own bitter tongue for company—clenched his fist and felled her to the floor, the back of her head striking against Braunt's door as she went down.

Braunt, pulling open his door, found the husband walking over, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say staggering over, the prostrate body of his wife. Joe clutched the drunkard and flung him airily over the landing rail. The ill-used man rolled down the stairs and out into the court, where he lay in a heap and groaned. Braunt lifted the woman and carried her to her room. She had a dazed idea of what had happened, and at once, rather incoherently at first, began to give the rescuer her opinion of him.

Who was he, she would like to know, to interfere between man and wife, great strong brute that he was? If her man had been sober he'd have given him what for; takin' advantage of a pore man wot 'ad a drop too much. Braunt went downstairs and lifted the 'pore' man, who had certainly had one drop too much, carried him up, and laid him in his room with his wife.

'You've killed the pore man, as never did no 'arm to you,' screamed the wife.

'No such luck,' said Braunt; 'he's too drunk to hurt.'

Which was indeed the case. Joe gently shut the door behind him, and left them to fight it out, if they wanted to.

Mrs. Scimmins had much sympathy from the court, when she related the incident. The women were more indignant than the men. It was a fine state of things if a great, hulking, sulky brute like Braunt was to interfere in little matrimonial discussions that happen in all well-regulated families. Much as they disliked the police, it seemed that now, if ever, their aid should be invoked.

'If he'd tried to break every bone in my man's body, Mrs. Scimmins,' said one bulky woman, 'I'd 'a 'ad 'im by the 'air.'

'I dunno 'baht that, Sarah,' said Mrs. Scimmins, who did not wish to rest under the imputation of not doing all she could for her husband in his comparatively helpless state. 'Wot with being 'it in the 'ead, and the face and the back, and then my 'ead strikin' the door, and one eye as I couldn't see out on, and yer 'usban' a-tramplin' of yer, yer wouldn't 'ave breath enough to 'ave anybody by the 'air.' Mrs. Scimmins pressed tenderly the bruised and still swollen portion of her face under the eye, and felt that she had made out her case; in fact, her defence was accepted as a strong plea that only made Braunt's inhuman and uncalled-for conduct stand out the darker by comparison.

The men were astonished, of course, but not so emphatic in their denunciation of Braunt as the wives had been. Scimmins bore no particular malice against his assailant; although what he had thrown him over the stairs for, he expressed himself as unable to conceive. In answer to sympathetic inquiries from his friends at the public bar of the Rose and Crown, he informed them that, although shaky, he was still in the ring.

'Lord 'elp us!' he went on, more in sorrow than in

anger. 'Wot's this world a-comin' to? If you arsts me, I gives it up. Wot with Braunt and the police both on a chap's shoulders if he raises 'is 'and to 'is own wife, the court's no fit place for a pore, 'ard-workin' man to live in.'

But nobody ventured to remonstrate with the Yorkshireman, least of all Scimmins, although the court as a community held more aloof from Braunt than ever.

'Are you coming to the meeting to-night, Mr. Braunt?' asked young Marston, when he had greeted father and daughter.

'Not me.'

'Why not?'

'Why go?'

'Well, you see, Mr. Braunt, there is a crisis on. The committee is to report. Mr. Sartwell has refused to meet them, and this will likely anger Gibbons and the others. 'Strike or no strike' will be put to vote, and I for one don't want to see a strike—at least, not just now.'

'No more do Ah,' said Braunt.

'Then come on to the meeting and speak up against a strike.'

'Ah'm no speaker. Ye speak.'

'They won't listen to me, but they would pay attention to what you said.'

'Not a bit of it, ma lad. But it doesn't matter to me, not a ha'porth.'

'What doesn't? Whether there is a strike or not?'

'Ah'm not goin' to strike. They can do as they've a mind.'

'But if the Union orders us out, we'll have to go.'

'Not me.'

'Supposing the strike succeeds, as it may, the Union's very strong—what will you do then?'

'Stick to ma work and mind ma own business.'

'But the Union won't let you. If the strike fails,

you'll merely get the ill-will of all the men; if it succeeds, they'll force you out of the Works. There's no use running your head against a brick wall, Mr. Braunt.'

'Ye speak; ye've got the gift o' th' gab,' said Braunt.

'I'm too young. They won't listen to me now. But a day will come when they will—aye, and the masters, too. I'd willingly devote my life to the cause of the working-man.'

Marston spoke with the fire of youthful enthusiasm, and was somewhat disconcerted when the other took his pipe from his mouth and laughed.

'Why do you laugh?'

'Ah'm laughin' at ye. Ah'm glad to know there's some one believes in us; but as thou says, thou'rt yoong; thou'll know better later on.'

'Don't you believe in yourself and your fellow-workers?'

'Not me. Ah know 'em ta well. "By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou earn thy bread." Them's not the right words, happen, but that's the meaning. It has been, is now, and iver shall be. Amen.'

'I don't object to that, Mr. Braunt,' cried the young man, rising and pacing the floor in his excitement. 'Don't think it. But I want to see everybody work. What I object to is earning your bread by the sweat of the hired man's brow, as some one has said. Bless me! look at our numbers. We outnumber the loafers ten to one—yes, a hundred to one—in every country in the world. All we need is an unselfish leader.'

The elder man looked at him with a quizzical smile on his stern lips.

'Think o' the number of the sands on the seaside. Will any leader make a rope oot o' them? Numbers are nothing, ma lad. Tak care o' yerself, Marston, and niver mind th' workers—that's th' rule o' th'

world. Ye ma' pull yerself oop, but ye can't lift them wi' ye. They've broken the hearts—aye, and the heads too—o' many a one that tried to better them. Ye think ye've only the masters and capital to fight. The masters won't hurt ye; it's the men ye're fighting for that will down ye. Wait till yer head is an inch above the crowd, then ye'll catch it from the sticks of every rotten one o' them that thinks he's got as much right as ye have to be in command. It isn't the money that helps the masters; it's because they've the sense to know a good man when they see him, and to stand by him when they've got him. Don't be fooled by numbers, ma lad. What's the good o' them? One determined man who doesn't need to bother about his backing—who knows his principles will support him through thick and thin—will beat any mob. Why can a small company of soldiers put down a riot? It's because they're commanded by one man. When he says "Jump," they jump; when he says "Shoot," they shoot. That's the whole secret of it.'

Braunt resumed his pipe and smoked vigorously to get back to his usual state of taciturnity. Marston had never heard him talk so long before, and he stood pondering what had been said. Braunt was the first to speak.

'Play the "Dead March," Jessie,' he said, gruffly.

The girl hesitated a moment, evidently loth to begin when Marston was in the room, a slight hectic colour mounting to her cheek, but obedience was strong in her: her father was not a man to be disobeyed. She drew up her chair and began Chopin's 'Funeral March,' playing it very badly, but still recognizably.

Peace seemed to come over Braunt as he listened to the dirge. He sat back in the chair, his eyes turned towards the ceiling, smoking steadily. Marston sat down meditating on what Braunt had said. He was not old enough to have his opinions fixed, and to be

impervious to argument; so Braunt's remarks troubled him. He hoped they were not true, but feared that they might be. The mournful cadence of the music, which seemed to soothe the soul of the elder man, wound itself among the younger man's thoughts, and dragged them towards despair. The indifference of the men in front of the public-house flashed across his memory and depressed him. He wished Jessie would stop playing.

'Ah!' said Braunt, with a deep sigh, when she did stop. 'That's the grandest piece o' music ever made. It runs in ma head all day. The throb o' the machinery at the Works seems to be tuned to it. It's in the roar of the streets. Coom, ma lad, Ah'll go wi' ye, because ye want me to—not that it will do any good. Ah'll speak if ye like; not that they'll care mooch for what Ah say—nor hearken, very like. But coom along, ma lad.'

CHAPTER VIII

BRAUNT and Marston passed from the dimness of Rose Garden Court into the brilliancy of Light Street, which on certain nights in the week was like one prolonged fair, each side being lined with heaped-up costers' barrows, radiant with flaring naphtha. Incense was being burned—evil-smelling incense—to the God of Cheapness. Hordes of women, down at the heel, were bargaining with equally impecunious venders—meeting and chaffering on the common level of poverty.

Turning into a side street, and then into a narrower lane, the two men came to a huge building, where a branch of the Salvation Army held its services—a building let temporarily to the workmen of Monkton and Hope for the discussion of their grievances. The place was crowded to the doors, and the latest comers had some difficulty in making their way along one of the walls, towards the front platform, where they at last found room halfway between the doors and the speakers.

Scimmins was in the chair, looking very uneasy and out of place, not knowing exactly what was expected of him, smiling a wan, deprecatory smile occasionally as some of his friends in the crowd made audible remarks about his elevation, and the native dignity he brought to bear on his office. One gave it as his

opinion (if you asked him) that Scimmins would have looked more natural with a pint pot in his right hand, instead of the mallet with which he was supposed to keep order.

On chairs in a row at the back of the platform sat the members of the committee, looking, most of them, quite as uncomfortable as the chairman. A few reporters were writing at a table provided for them. Sometimes one whispered a question to the chairman or a member of the committee, and received the almost invariable answer, 'Blest if know; arsk Gibbons.'

Gibbons was quite palpably the man of the hour. He was on his feet by virtue of his position as chairman of the committee and secretary to the Union, and was just finishing the reading of the committee's report as Braunt and Marston found standing-room at the side of the hall.

'And finally your committee begs leave to report that, Mr. Sartwell having rejected all overtures from your committee, refusing to confer with it either through its chairman or as a body, it was resolved that this report be drawn up and presented to you in order that definite action may be taken upon it.'

Mr. Gibbons, when he had finished reading the document, placed it upon the reporters' table for the closer inspection of the pressmen. He had drawn up the report himself, and was naturally rather proud of the wording, and he hoped to see it printed in the newspapers. He turned to his audience, after saluting the chairman.

'Now, gentlemen, you have heard the report. The committee appointed by you, empowered by you, acting for you, vested with your authority, has done all in its power to bring this matter to an amicable conclusion. It has left no stone unturned, shrunk from no honourable means, spared no trouble, to bring about an understanding, fair alike to employer and employed. But, gentlemen, your committee has been

met at the very threshold with a difficulty which it could not surmount; a difficulty which has rendered all its efforts abortive. The firm of Monkton and Hope refers the committee to Mr. Sartwell, the manager; and Mr. Sartwell absolutely refuses to see the committee and discuss anything with it. This man, who was once a workman himself, now arrogates——'

Here one of the reporters pulled Gibbons' coat-tail, and a whispered colloquy took place. When it was over, Mr. Gibbons continued,—

'A gentleman of the Press has asked me a question —and a very proper question it is. He asks if we threatened Mr. Sartwell in any way with a strike, as has been rumoured. Gentlemen, no threats of any kind whatever have been used. (Cheers.) We have approached Mr. Sartwell with the same deference that we would have approached a member of Her Majesty's Government if we had a petition to present. The sum and substance of the whole business is, that Mr. Sartwell absolutely refuses to treat with his own men when they have—— '

'That is not true,' said a voice from the side of the hall.

The crowd turned their heads towards the sound, noticeably gleeful at an interruption, which promised liveliness ahead. There was a murmur of pleasurable anticipation. Gibbons turned sharply towards the point from which the voice came.

'What is not true?' he demanded.

'It's not true that Mr. Sartwell refuses to see his own men.'

'Are you one of them?'

'Yes. Are you?'

There was a rustle of intense enjoyment at this palpable hit at Gibbons. The glib speaker himself was taken aback by the retort, but only for a moment.

'I thought,' continued the secretary, 'that it might

have been some one sent here to interrupt this meeting. Such may still be the case, but we waive that point. We will not follow Mr. Sartwell's example; and if there is any friend of his present we shall be pleased to hear from him at the proper time. As I was about to say when I was int——'

'I answered your question; answer mine!' cried the voice.

Gibbons glanced appealingly at the chair for protection, and Scimmins rapped feebly with his gavel on the table in front of him, saying 'Order, order!' but in a tone that he apparently hoped nobody would hear.

'What is your question?' asked Gibbons, with an angry ring in his voice.

'Are you employed by Monkton and Hope?'

'I am secretary of the Union of which the firm's men are a part—the strongest Union in London. I am chairman of this committee composed of that firm's men. I did not seek the position, but was unanimously elected to it; therefore I claim that practically I am employed by Monkton and Hope, and that no man here has a better right to speak for their workmen—aye, or to stand up for them against oppression—than I have. And I will tell the man who interrupts me—I'll tell him to his face—that I am not to be browbeaten from the path of duty, by him or by Mr. Sartwell either, so long as I retain the confidence of the men who put me where I am. I acknowledge no other masters. If you want to address this meeting, come up on the platform and face it like a man, and don't stand barking there like a dog. Let's have a look at you.'

There was wild cheering at this. The fight was on, and the crowd was jubilant. This was the kind of talk they liked to hear.

Braunt smote young Marston on the back and pushed him forward.

'Tak oop the challenge, lad,' he cried. 'Oop wi'

ye. Ah'll follow ye and give them some facts aboot the unemployed. We've got this meeting if we work it right. Oop wi' ye, mate.'

Marston went towards the platform, the crowd making way for him. Gibbons stood for a moment apparently surprised at this unexpected opposition, then walked back to his seat at the head of the committee. The good-natured gathering cheered when they saw the young man standing before them.

'Fellow working-men,' he began.

'Address the chair,' admonished some one in the middle of the hall; whereat there was a laugh, Scimmins himself indulging in a sickly smile. The speaker reddened slightly, and in confused haste said—

'Mr. Chairman and fellow-workers ——'

The crowd cheered lustily, and it was some moments before Marston could again get a hearing. A feeling of despair came over him as he stood facing them. It was only too evident that they all looked upon the proceedings as a great piece of fun; something in the way of a music-hall entertainment, without any beer —which was a drawback, of course; but also without any charge for admission—which was an advantage, for it left so much more cash to spend in stimulants after the fun was over. He wondered as he looked at the chaffing, jocular assemblage whether he was not taking too serious a view of the situation. There flashed across his mind a sentence which he had heard in a lecture on Socialism. 'It is not the capitalist nor the Government you have to conquer,' the lecturer had said, 'but the workmen themselves.'

When the disorder had subsided so that his voice could be heard, Marston went on—

'Mr. Gibbons asserted that the manager had refused to consult with his workmen, and I replied that such a statement was not true. Mr. Sartwell told me himself that he was willing to receive a deputation from the men of the Works. He said——'

'What's that?' cried Gibbons, springing to his feet, and taking a step forward.

'Doan't interrupt th' speaker,' shouted Braunt, from the body of the hall.

'He interrupted me!' roared Gibbons, now thoroughly angry. Turning to the young man, who stood there, silently waiting for statement and retort to cease, the secretary demanded—

'When did Sartwell tell you that?'

'On Tuesday night.'

'On Tuesday night!' repeated Gibbons, coming to the front of the platform. 'On Tuesday night! And you have the brazen cheek to stand here and admit it.'

'Why shouldn't I?' asked Marston, with perceptible self-control, but whitening round his tightened lips.

'Why shouldn't you? I'll tell you why. Because you sneaked in behind the backs of the committee you had helped to appoint. That's why.'

'I had no hand in appointing the committee.'

'Every man in the Works had a hand in appointing the committee. If you didn't vote, then you neglected your duty. If you voted against the committee, you were bound by the result just as the committee would have been bound if it had been defeated. That's trade unionism — stand together or fall together. You, knowing a committee had been appointed to deal with this very business, must go crawling to Sartwell, and undermine the work of your fellow-unionists——'

'That's a lie!' hissed Marston, through his set teeth, in a low but intense tone of voice, which was heard at the further end of the hall. The young man strode towards his antagonist, his right hand nervously clenching and unclenching. It was an electric moment: the crowd held its breath. All expected the next move would be a blow.

Gibbons stood his ground without flinching. Not a muscle of his face moved except his eyelids, which

partially closed over his eyes, leaving a slit through which a steely glance was shot at Marston, but his answer was not so truculent as his look.

'If it's a lie,' he said, calmly, to the evident disappointment of his hearers, 'then the lie is not mine. I was merely putting your own statement in a little terser language; that's all.'

Braunt, who had with difficulty kept his hot temper in hand during this colloquy on the platform, now roared, at the top of his voice: 'Give t' lad a chance to speak, and shut yere silly mouth. He's called ye a liar like a man, and ye dar'n't take him oop like a man. Sit down, you fool!'

'I must really ask the protection of the chair,' protested the secretary, turning to Scimmins. The latter, feeling that something was expected of him, rose rather uncertainly to his feet, and struck the table three or four times with his mallet.

'Order, order!' he cried. 'If there is any more disturbance down there, the man will be put out of the meeting.'

'What?' shouted Braunt. 'Put me oot! Egod, Ah'll give 'e th' chance.'

The big man made his way towards the platform, brushing aside from his path a few who, in the interests of peace, endeavoured to oppose him. The majority of those present, however, were manifestly of opinion that the progress of the angry man should not be barred; so they cheered his intervention and made encouraging remarks.

Braunt sprang upon the platform, advanced to the chair, smote his clenched fist on the table, and cried—

'Here Ah am, Scimmins. Now put me oot; d'ye hear?'

He paused for a reply, but there was none; Scimmins shrinking from him, obviously prepared for flight if Braunt attempted to storm the position. The Yorkshireman glared about him, but those on the platform

appeared to think that the time for protest had not yet arrived. Meanwhile, several in the audience were calling loudly for a speech.

'Ah haven't mooch to say, mates,' said Braunt, calming down through lack of opposition, 'and Ah'm no man at th' gab. Ah'm a worker, and all Ah want is a chance to earn ma bread. But Ah'll say this—Ah saw in t' papers not so long ago that there's twenty-seven thousand men of oor trade oot o' work in England to-day. Twenty-seven thousand men anxious for a job! Now, what is this man Gibbons asking ye to do? He's asking ye to choock oop yere jobs and have yere places taken by some o' them twenty-seven thousand. Sartwell has only to put an advertisement in the papers, and he can fill the shops five times over in two days. It's always easier to choock oop a job than to get a new one these times. Ah know, because Ah've tried it. So have most of ye. Tak ma advice and go no further wi' this nonsense. If Sartwell, as Marston says, is willing to talk over grievances, then, Ah say, let us send him a deputation o' oor own men, with no outsiders among 'em. What's the Union done for us? Taken oor money ivery week, that's all Ah can see. And now they have got so mooch o' it they want to squander it fighting a strong man like Sartwell.'

Marston had sat down on the edge of the platform. People are always quicker to perceive the mistakes of others than to recognize their own; and he did not like Braunt's talk against the Union. He felt that it would be unpopular; besides, he believed in the Union if it were properly represented; his fight was against Gibbons, not against the organization. Gibbons had rapidly taken the measure of the speaker. He saw that the address was having its effect, and that the crowd was slipping away from his own control.

It was a risky thing to do in regard to such a powerful man, but he made up his mind that Braunt must be angered, when he would most likely, in his

violence, lose the ground which he had gained; so Gibbons quietly, by a slight movement of the head, called up his trusty henchmen who were scattered in different parts of the hall, to give an appearance of unanimity to the shouting when the proper time came; and these men now gradually edged to the front. One or two silently mounted the platform and held a whispered conference with the secretary, after which they and some others took up a position behind the seated committee. When Sartwell was alluded to, Gibbons arose.

'Mr. Chairman,' he said, 'I cannot allow——'

Braunt turned on him like a raging lion.

'Don't ye interrupt me,' he cried, rolling up his sleeves, 'or Ah'll bash ye through that window.'

'Order, order!' said the chairman, faintly.

'Yes, an' ye atop o' him,' shouted the infuriated man. 'Ah've done that sort o' thing before.'

'Respect the meeting, if you have no regard for the chair,' said Gibbons, calmly.

'You talk to us as if we were a parcel of fools,' cried a man in front.

Braunt, like a baited bull, not knowing in which direction to rush, turned his eyes, blazing with rage, upon the last speaker. He shook his clenched fist and bared arm at the audience.

'What else are ye?' he roared, at the top of his voice. 'A parcel o' domned fools, the lot o' ye. Led by the nose by a still bigger fool than any o' ye. Yes. A set o' chattering idiots, that's what ye are, with not enooph brains among the lot o' ye to turn a grindstone. Ah know ye, a beer-sodden gang, with just enooph sense to see that your pint moog's full.'

By this time those in the hall were in a state of exasperation bordering on frenzy. A small door, to the right of the platform, giving egress into an alley, had been opened, and a number of the more timid, seeing a storm impending, had quietly slipped out.

The meeting had now become a seething mob, crying for the blood of the man who stood there defying and heaping contumely upon it.

Gibbons, his lips pale but firm, took a step forward.

'We have had enough of this,' he said. 'Get off the platform.'

Braunt turned as if on a pivot, and rushed at the secretary. The latter stepped nimbly back; and one of his supporters, with a running jump and hop, planted his foot squarely in Braunt's stomach. The impetus was so great, and the assault so sudden and unexpected, that Braunt, powerful as he was, doubled up like a 'two-foot' rule, and fell backward from the platform to the floor. Instantly a dozen men pounced upon him, and hustled him, in spite of his striking out right and left, through the open door into the alley. The door was then closed and bolted in the twinkling of an eye, Braunt outside and his assailants within.

It was all so neatly and so quickly done, that the police, who had been on the alert for some time, only reached the spot when the door was bolted. The crowd, with but the vaguest general notion of what had happened, excepting that they had seen the sudden backward collapse of Braunt, raised a wild cheer, for which Gibbons was thankful. He did not wish them to know that Braunt had been taken in hand by the police outside; and he had been very anxious, if an arrest were inevitable, that it should not take place in the hall, for then even Braunt's violent tirade would not have prevented universal sympathy turning towards him.

While the cheer was ringing up to the roof, Gibbons heard a terrific blow delivered against the door—a blow which almost broke off the bolt, causing the faces of those standing near to turn pale. Another crashing stroke shattered the panel and gave a glimpse for the moment of bleeding knuckles. Then there was an indication of a short sharp struggle in the

alley, and all was quiet save the reverberating echo of the cheer.

Gibbons strode to the front of the platform and held up his hand for silence.

'I am very sorry,' he said, 'that the last speaker made some remarks which ought not to have been made; but let us all remember that hard words break no bones. However, there has been enough talk for one night, and it is time to proceed to business. Gentlemen, you have heard the report of the committee—what is your pleasure?'

'I move,' said a man, rising in the middle of the hall, 'that we go on strike.'

'I second that motion,' cried several voices.

'Put the motion,' whispered Gibbons to the bewildered chairman.

Scimmins rose to his feet.

'You have all heard the motion,' he said. 'All in favour say "Aye."'

A seemingly universal shout of 'Aye' arose. The chairman was on the point of resuming his seat when Gibbons, in a quick aside, said, 'Contrary.'

'All to the contrary?' called out the chairman, hovering between sitting and standing.

There was no dissent, for Marston had left the place to see what had become of his friend, and the timorous men had stolen away when they had detected signs of disturbance.

'Motion's carried,' said Scimmins, seating himself, with every indication of relief.

'Unanimously,' added Gibbons, loudly, unable to conceal his satisfaction with the result.

CHAPTER IX

THERE are streets in Chelsea practically abandoned to studios. Long, low buildings of one story, with many doors in front, and great broadsides of windows at the back—multi-paned windows letting in from the north the light that artists love—line these thoroughfares, which Barney in his jocular, off-hand manner called Aurora Borealis streets, because, as he always explained, they were so full of Northern Lights.

Such studios are all very well for the ordinary everyday artist who exhibits at the Royal Academy and places of that sort; but a painter with a soul (and, incidentally, a reliable bank account) desires something better than one of these barns, so Barney had taken a house and fitted it up to meet his requirements. Craigenputtock House, as Barney called it, in tardy recognition of the genius of Thomas Carlyle, was a building of three stories, standing back from the street in grounds of its own. The rooms on the upper floor were allowed to remain as they were, and gave Barney bedrooms for himself and his friends—his hospitality being unique and unlimited.

All the partitions on the first floor had been taken away, so that this portion of the house was formed into one vast apartment, with the exception of a space for a noble landing, up to which, in dignified manner

befitting a temple of art, rose a broad flight of stone steps that replaced the ordinary wooden stair-way which had contented the former occupants of the house. To afford the support necessary for the upper floor, now that the partitions were taken away, huge square beams of timber had been put in, and these gave the ceiling of the roomy studio that barn-roof appearance so necessary to the production of works of the higher art.

Barney's mother objected to the bare coldness of the uncovered stone stairs. As they were inside the house, she said, and were not the steps that led up to the front door, they should have a carpet on them. Barney admitted that under ordinary circumstances this was so, and willingly offered to make a certain concession should the occasion arise. If Royalty visited him, he would put down the customary red carpet upon which the feet of Royalty were in the habit of treading. In fact, he admitted to his mother that a roll of red carpet had already been purchased, and was at that moment in the closet under the stairs to be ready at a moment's notice. But for everyday wear the steps should remain uncovered, because the stone stair-ways of the Pitti Palace were always bare, and as Barney intended ultimately to make Craigenputtock House quite as celebrated in the world of art as the Florentine Gallery, he would follow its precedent so far as stairs were concerned. There is nothing like beginning right.

On the ground-floor were dining-room and kitchen, below that a well-filled cellar. The hall was toned a rich Pompeian red, and was lighted by two windows of brilliant stained glass, which had been put in when the building was transformed from a residence into a studio.

'Oh yes,' Barney would say, when he was complimented on these windows; 'they are all very well in their way, but not original, don't you know—not

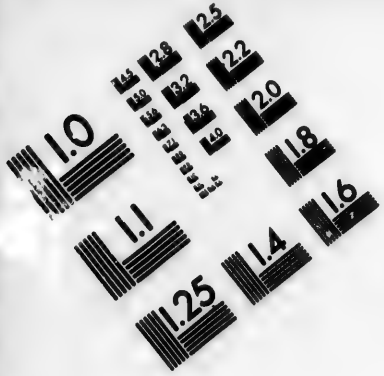
original. No; they are simply nicely executed copies of a portion of a window in Cologne Cathedral, done in 1508. I placed them there temporarily, because I have been so busy that I have not had time to design anything better myself, which I shall do later on, don't you know.'

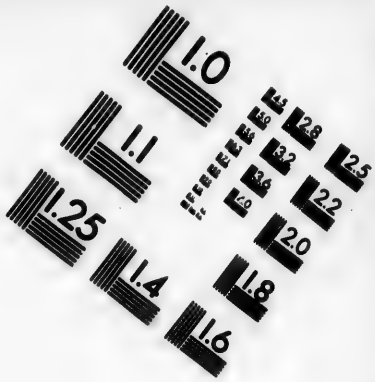
But of all the ornamental appendages to this studio, perhaps the most striking was Barney's 'man,' attired in a livery of blue, crimson, and silver which was exceedingly effective. Although Barney had not had time to design a stained-glass window which would excel those of Cologne, he had been compelled to sketch out this livery—for it was hardly a thing that one could copy from abroad, and the Hope family had not been established long enough to have a recognized livery of its own.

Nothing gives character and dignity to a place so much as a 'man' sumptuously fitted out in a style that is palpably regardless of cost; and if it may be plainly seen that the 'man' performs no needful function whatever, then is the effect heightened, for few human beings attain the apex of utter uselessness. The great hotels of this country recognize the distinction reflected upon them by the possession of a creature of splendour at their doors, who grandly wafts the incoming guests with a hand-wave towards the hall. But these persons of embellishment often demean themselves by opening the doors of cabs and performing other useful acts, thus detracting from their proper function, which was, Barney insisted, to content themselves with being merely beautiful.

When a visitor once complained that the man at the top of the stairs had refused to direct him into the studio, Barney laid his right hand in friendly brotherliness on the visitor's shoulder and said—

'He knew, dear boy, that I would discharge him instantly if he so far forgot himself as to answer a question.'





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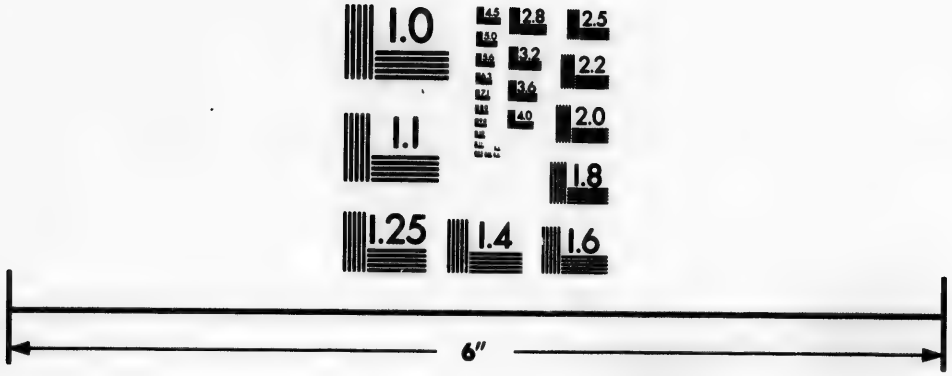

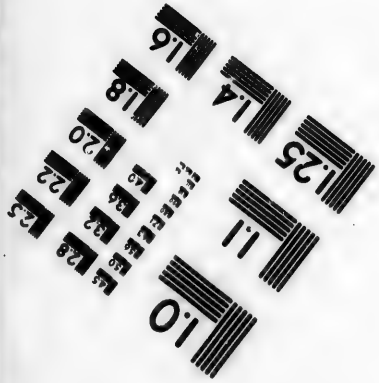

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'Then what is he there for?' asked the visitor, with some indignation; 'I don't see the use of him.'

'Quite so, quite so,' answered Barney, soothingly. 'If you did, I would have to get rid of him and engage another; and I can assure you that perfectly useless persons six feet two in height are not to be picked up at every street corner. No, dear boy, they are not, I give you my word. People are so unthinking that they *will* ask foolish questions. I intend to discourage this habit as much as possible. You want to know what he is there for? Now, if I had placed a marble statue at the top of the staircase, you would not have been offended if it did not answer your query, don't you know; and you would not have asked what it was there for, don't you know. There are so many useful things in this world, that something untainted with utilitarianism ought to be welcomed by every thinking man; and if this deplorably practical country is ever to be redeemed, we artists must lead the way, don't you see?'

The grand individual at the head of the stairs had his uses, nevertheless; for when Haldiman and another, accepting Barney's effusively cordial invitations to attend one of his 'At Homes,' entered the hall below and saw this magnificent person standing like a resplendent statue before and above them, Haldiman gasped, 'Great heavens!' and groped his way out on to the pavement again, followed by his no less astounded companion, an artist who was also struggling along in the black-and-white line. The two exchanged glances when at a safe distance from the studio, pausing as they did so. Their amazement was almost too great for words, yet Haldiman remarked, solemnly,—

'I might have expected something of that sort. Imagine us dropping in there with these clothes on! Lucky escape. I know a place on the King's Road where they sell good drinks. Let us go there and

see if we can recover from this blow. Oh, Barney, Barney, what deeds are done in thy name!'

So the living statue silently warned off Barney's Bohemian friends, who are all right in Paris, don't you know, but not at all desirable when a man settles down to serious work and expects nobility at his receptions.

The calm dignity of Barney's man was set off in a measure by the energetic activity of a boy in buttons who threw open the door with a flourish. 'Buttons' might be likened to a torpedo-boat darting hither and thither under the shelter of a stately ironclad. While the left hand of the small boy opened the door, his right swept up to his cap in a semi-military salute, which welcomed the coming and sped the parting guest.

Barney's 'afternoon' was at its height when the doorbell was rung by a young man who had not received an invitation; still 'Buttons' did not know that, and he swung open the door with as grand a flourish as if the visitor had been a duke. The incomer was as much taken aback by the sight of Barney's 'man'—that triumph of nature and art—at the head of the stairs, as Haldiman had been; but although he paused for a moment in wonder, he did not retreat. He had a vague notion for an instant that it might be Barney himself, but reflection routed that idea. The latest visitor was entering a world unfamiliar to him, but his common sense whispered that the inhabitants of this world did not dress in such a fashion as the 'man' whom Marston saw before him.

'Is Mr. Barnard Hope at home?' he asked.

'Yes, sir,' answered the boy, with a bow and a wave of his hand. 'This is his day. What name, sir?'

'Marston.'

'Mr. Marston!' shouted the boy up the stair-way.

The decorated sphinx at the top remained un-

influenced by the announcement; but a less resplendent menial appeared, who held back the heavy curtains as Marston mounted the stairs; and, when he entered, he heard his name repeated ahead of him amid the murmur of conversation.

The sight that met Marston's eyes as he entered the studio was rather disconcerting to a diffident man, but he was relieved to notice, after a moment's breathless pause upon the threshold, that nobody was paying the slightest attention to him.

The large room seemed bewilderingly full of people, and a number of men were standing with their backs against the walls as if they formed part of the mural decorations. Many of them held teacups in their hands, and all of them looked more or less bored. The divans and chairs had been arranged in rows, as if they were to be used by the guests for the viewing of some spectacle; and every seat was taken, most of the occupants being ladies. Two men-servants were handing round tea and cake, while Barney himself flitted hither and thither like a gigantic butterfly in a rose garden, scattering geniality and good humour wherever he went. The steady hum of conversation was enlivened constantly by silvery laughter. It was evident that the gathering, with the possible exception of that part of it which was standing pensively round the walls, was enjoying itself.

As the eyes of young Marston became accustomed to the throng, his heart suddenly stopped, and then went on beating with increased speed as he recognized Edna Sartwell sitting on one of the front chairs, smiling at some humorous remark which Barney, leaning over her, was making. A moment before Marston had been conquering his impulse to retreat, by telling himself that all these idle persons were nothing to him; but now, when he had recognized one person who was everything to him, he had to quell his abating panic with a new formula.

Although out of his element and ill at ease, he now felt that he could not quit the field in a fright before the task which he had set himself to perform was begun. In the depths of his nature there was a certain bulldog obstinacy, the limitations of which had never yet been reached; although this unexpected meeting with a number of his fellow-creatures in a social station evidently higher than his own, put a severe strain upon his moral bravery. In vain he told himself that he was as good as any of them; for in his heart he did not believe that he was, and the mute assertion was of little value to him. Finally he took courage, and spoke to the servant who had held aside the curtains for him.

'Would you tell Mr. Hope that I wish to speak with him for a moment?'

Barney approached the young man with smiling face and extended hand. 'Oh, how d'ye do, how d'ye do? I am so glad you were able to come to my little affair. You are just in time—just in time, don't you know.'

Then as Barney's artistic eye rapidly took in the appearance of his guest, he realized that the newcomer's clothes had not quite the air of Bond Street about them, in spite of the fact that they were obviously the best his visitor possessed. The smile faded from the artist's face.

'Oh, pardon me!' he added; 'I thought I recognized you, but I don't think I've had the pleasure of——'

'No. We are not acquainted, Mr. Hope. I am one of the workmen in your father's factory.'

'Really! You have some message for me, perhaps?'

'I came of my own accord. I wished very particularly to speak with you on business.'

'Oh, but really, my good fellow, don't you know, this is my 'At Home' day. I never talk business on these days—never. If you want to buy any of my

pictures, or anything of that sort, don't you know, you must come another day.'

'I did not come about pictures, but about something vastly different and more serious.'

'My good fellow—you'll excuse my interrupting you, won't you? There is no serious business except art, and to-day I don't even talk art.'

'Human lives,' said Marston, hotly, 'are more serious than art.'

'Please don't raise your voice. You are certainly wrong about things; but I haven't time to correct you to-day, don't you know. All one needs to say about your last remark is that human lives are ephemeral, while art is everlasting. Therefore is art the more important of the two. But we'll let that pass. Can't you come and talk another day? I'm sure I shall be delighted to see you at any time.'

'Couldn't you give me five minutes out on the landing?'

'It is impossible. I cannot leave my guests. You see, we have the dancing Earl on in a few moments. His Lordship is just now arranging his skirts. I really must go, don't you know.'

'Then I will stay until the Earl has done his dancing, if that is what he is here for.'

'Do, my dear fellow, do. A most excellent idea. I am sure you will like it, for, though I have not seen the dance myself, I understand it is quite unique. Have a cup of tea? I would have sent you a card if I had thought that any of my father's workmen were interested in the latest movements of art; but never mind the lack of invitation—if you care to stay without it, I shall be delighted. It is really good of you to drop in, in this unexpected way; it is the kind of thing I like; so Bohemian, don't you know. You'll excuse me, now, I'm sure.' And Barney tripped away to see that all arrangements for the appearance of the Earl were complete.

The model-stand had been pushed to one end of the room fronting the audience; heavy curtains had been drawn across the big north window, leaving the place in semi-darkness; there was the hissing and sputtering of a lime-light in the gallery, causing inquisitive people to turn their heads to see what it was.

Marston stood against the wall beside another guest, who said to him, in a weary tone,—

'Who is this man, Barnard Hope?'

'He is an artist,' answered Marston, astonished that one guest should question a stranger regarding their mutual host.

'Evidently,' replied the other. 'But who are his people, or has he any?'

'His father is one of the richest manufacturers in London.'

'Egad, I was sure of it. I knew there was a shop somewhere in the background; the fellow is so beastly civil.'

Conversation was here interrupted by a figure leaping on to the model-stand, while at the same instant a blinding white light was thrown from the gallery upon it. There was a ripple of applause, and the Earl, a beardless youth of perhaps twenty, bowed, looking like a girl in his clinging fluted skirts. He was a scion of a noble family, founded by an affectionate dancer of the opposite sex in the reign of the Second Charles; and it is quite in the regular order of things that there should be a recrudescence of terpsichorean ability in the latest member of the house.

The white light changed to red, and the skirt-dance began. As it went on it was received with tumultuous applause; for a London audience is always easy to please, especially when there is no charge for admission at the doors. Moreover, it must be admitted that the sprightly little Earl deserved the warmth of his

reception, for his exhibition was a model of grace and agility, while his manipulation of the voluminous skirts left little to be desired. The variegated colours thrown on the fluttering, whirling drapery gave a weird, unearthly effect to the rapid movements of his Lordship; and the grand finale, when a crimson light was flung upon the flimsy silk waving high above the dancer's head, gave the agile young nobleman the appearance of one of the early martyrs wrapped in flames.

The curtains were drawn back; the entranced assemblage rose to its feet, and, gathering about the host, congratulated him upon the success of his entertainment. Barney received these felicitations with exuberant gratification; and the young Earl, finally emerging from behind the scenes—clothed and in his right mind, but a trifle breathless—accepted modestly his well-earned share of the compliments; for, let cynics say what they will, true merit is always sure of appreciation in the Great City.

Edna Sartwell lingered for a moment on the outskirts of the throng which pressed round Barney and the Earl, then leisurely made her way towards the door, waiting for her step-mother, who lingered to thank her host. The men who had stood along the walls were already in the street, and the other visitors had nearly all departed.

Marston remained where he had been standing while the entertainment was going on, gazing with beating heart upon the girl he loved. She came slowly towards him, her head averted, watching her step-mother in the fast thinning group about Barney. There was a certain unconsciousness about her movements, as if the young man had hypnotized her and was drawing her to him by mere force of will. At last her dress touched him, and his nerves tingled to his finger-ends. Almost involuntarily he murmured—

'Miss Sartwell.'

The girl turned her head quickly, and for a moment met his gaze without recognizing him.

'My name is Marston,' he said, huskily, seeing that she did not know him. 'I met you the other evening at your father's office, when he and I were talking of the strike.'

'Oh yes,' she replied; 'at first I did not remember you. I—I did not expect to——' She paused, and seemed confused, looking away from him.

'To find me here,' said the young man, completing the sentence for her; gathering courage as the delightful fact that he was actually talking to her, impressed its almost unbelievable reality upon him. 'I did not know there was anything like this going on. I came to consult Mr. Hope on the same subject——' He flushed as the memory of an entirely different subject arose in his mind, and he felt his newly acquired courage beginning to ebb again. He pulled himself together and ended, lamely: 'About the strike, you know.'

'Oh!' said Edna, instantly interested. 'Is there anything new about the strike?'

'Yes. There was a meeting last night, and it was unanimously resolved to stop work.'

The colour left the girl's cheeks.

'And are the men out? Is that why you are here to-day?'

'No. They do not go out until a week from Saturday. I did what I could to prevent it, but without success. I applied to the head of my department for this afternoon off. It seemed to me that, in the few intervening days before the men go out, something might be done, when the enthusiasm of the meeting has died down. That's why I came, but I'm afraid there is not much to look for here.'

'Does my father know?'

'About the strike? Oh yes.'

The girl's winsome face clouded with apprehension.

'I am so sorry,' she said, at last. 'I am sure it is not my father's fault, for he is kind to every one. Even if he is sometimes severe'—she cast a shy upward glance at the young man that made his heart beat faster—'he is always just.'

'Yes, I know that is true. He will certainly beat the men, and that is why I want moderate counsels to prevail. In a trade dispute, the working-man is always at a disadvantage. Most of his mouthing friends are fools, and he himself is the greatest fool of all.'

'Don't you think that you are a little hard on the working-man? Were you here in time to see the dancing Earl?'

She looked at him with a frank smile, and Marston smiled in company with her—it brightened his face wonderfully, and seemed to establish an evanescent bond of comradeship between them.

'I had forgotten the Earl,' he said.

'I must go now. I see my step-mother looking for me. I hope you will be successful in averting trouble at the Works.' She extended her hand to him, and he took it tenderly, fearing that he might grasp it too closely and so betray himself.

Mrs. Sartwell and her step-daughter were among the last to go. When none remained but Marston, Barney threw himself on a divan and lighted a cigarette.

'Well, my young friend, here we are alone at last. Help yourself to the cigarettes, and allow me to offer you something stronger than the tea with which we regale the ladies. We have several shots in the locker, so just name your particular favourite in the way of stimulant while I order a B. and S. for myself. You might not believe it, but one of these afternoons takes it out of a fellow more than a day's work at the factory. Not that I ever indulge in factory work myself, but I think you said it was in your line.'

'Yes,' said Marston, after declining the offerings of his host. 'It is about the factory that I wished to speak with you. The men resolved last night to go out on strike.'

'Foolish beggars!'

'I quite agree with you. Their action is worse than foolish; that is why I came to see if you would intervene in any way so that a better state of feeling might be brought about.'

'Well, now—let's see, I believe I have forgotten your name, or did you tell me?—ah, Marston—thanks—so many things on my mind, don't you know. You see, Mr. Marston, it's really no business of mine, although I must admit that your offer of the position of arbitrator flatters me. This makes twice I have been asked within a few days, so I think I must really be a born diplomat, don't you know. But you see, there's nothing I enjoy so much as minding my own business, and this strike is no affair of mine.'

'I think it is. All the luxury you have here is surely earned by the men I am now speaking for.'

'My dear fellow, you are not in the least flattering; you are not, I assure you. You are saying, in other words, that my pictures do not sell.'

'I had no intention of suggesting anything of the kind. I have no doubt you can sell anything you paint.'

'Ah, now you go to the other extreme, and are commending the artistic discernment of the British Public, which, at present, is a compliment the B. P. does not deserve. It will come round ultimately; the great B. P. always does, but not yet, my boy, not yet. Give it time, and it will pour cash into your lap. I regret that the moment—how shall I put it?—well, up to date, the time has not arrived. The workmen, whom you honour by associating with, at present supply—as you state it,

with unnecessary bluntness, perhaps—the financial deficiency. But the public will pay for it all in the end, every penny of it, my boy.

'You see these pictures round the walls. Very well; I hold them at two thousand pounds each. I find little difficulty in so holding them, for no section of the great British Public has, up to the present time, evinced any dogged desire to wrench them from me in exchange for so much gold. What is the consequence? I shall increase the price five hundred pounds every year, and the longer they hold off, the bigger sum they will have to pay; and serve them jolly well right, say I. Ten pictures, twenty thousand pounds—this year. Next year, twenty-five thousand pounds, and so on. With property on my hands increasing at that rate, I should be an idiot to urge people to buy. Ground-rents in Belgravia are not in it with my pictures as investments. So you see, Marston, when my day comes, the factory will be a mere triviality as an income-producer compared with my brush, don't you know.'

'But in the meantime?'

'In the meantime, I am getting along very nicely, thank you. The strike will not affect me in the least. The men may have to diminish their amount of shag or whatever awful mixture they smoke, but I shall not consume one cigarette the less. I have done nothing to bring on this struggle, so if the men want to fight, then, by Jingo, let them, say I.'

'The fight is not yet actually begun, and won't be until a week from Saturday. Now is the time for a cool-headed man to interfere and bring about an amicable understanding. Won't you at least make the attempt, Mr. Hope?'

'My dear Marston, the way of the self-appointed arbitrator is hard. I was reading in this morning's paper about your charming meeting last night; and I noticed that one man who interfered was kicked

off the platform and thrown out into a side street. That is the working-man's idea of how an intellectual discussion should be terminated. I love the working-man myself, but I sometimes wish he would not argue with his hob-nailed boot. By the way, did you witness that interesting episode? You were there, I suppose?'

'Yes. Braunt, who was kicked out, is one of the best workmen in the factory, but very hot-tempered. He lost control of himself last night, under strong provocation, and when he was outside tried to batter in the door. The police interfered, and he knocked down three of them. That was disastrous, for he was fined five pounds this morning, and I have been trying to raise the money so that he need not go to prison; but he and I are on the side of the minority; he exasperated our fellow-workmen, and I am not getting on well with the subscription list.'

Barney sprang to his feet.

'Knocked down three, did he? Good man! That's something like. It's a most deplorable trait in my character that I somehow enjoy an assault on the police, and yet I recognize the general usefulness of the force. Five pounds, did you say? Then there will be the costs? I don't understand much about these things, but I believe there are usually costs—on the principle of adding insult to injury, I suppose. Will a ten-pound note see him through? Good Here it is. Three pounds odd a policeman is no expensive when you think how much some of our luxuries here below cost, don't you know. No thanks, Marston, I beg of you; it's a pleasure, I assure you.'

As Marston took the money which was to release Braunt a servant came in and said, in a low voice,—

'Simpson wants to know if he may go, sir.'

'Bless me, yes. I thought he had gone long ago.—Simpson is my ornamental six-footer at the head of the stairs; perhaps you noticed him as you came in?

Poor fellow, he's not allowed to do anything but stand there and look pretty, so I suppose it gets wearisome. Imagine such Boy-stood-on-the-Burning-Deck devotion at this end of the nineteenth century! I had forgotten him, being absorbed in your interesting conversation. Well, Marston, I'm sorry I can't arbitrate; but drop in again and let me know how things go on. Good afternoon.'

CHAPTER X

ON Saturday, when the notices expired, the men took their well-earned pay, one by one, and went out of the gates quietly, if sullenly. During the time which had intervened between the date of the meeting and the hour at which the men actually struck work, neither side made advances to the other. If Sartwell had been preparing for the struggle, his preparations had been made so secretly that Gibbons failed to learn of them. The secretary of the Union issued a manifesto to the Press, setting forth the position of the men in temperate phrase, which had the effect of bringing public sympathy largely to the side of the workers.

The manifesto was an admirable document, and most of the papers published it, a few of them editorially regretting the fact that in this enlightened country and in this industrial age, some hundreds of men, the bone and sinew of the land, willing to work, were forced to go into the streets in protest against a tyranny which refused even to discuss their alleged wrongs. The newspapers pointed out that whether their grievances were just or not was beside the question, as the point was that the manager had refused to see a deputation; and this high-handed conduct the newspapers expressed themselves as forced to deplore.

Both members of the firm thought Gibbons' manifesto should be answered, but the manager did not agree with them; so it was not answered.

Pickets were placed before the gates, and a few extra policemen appeared, as if by accident, in the neighbourhood, but there was nothing for either policemen or pickets to do. On Monday some of the men lounging round the place looked up at the tall chimneys, and saw them, for the first time during their remembrance, smokeless. The workmen had never noticed the smoke before, but now its absence created an unexpected void in the murky outlook. It was as if the finger of Death had touched those gaunt, lofty stacks; and the unusual silence of the place which the men had always known to be so busy, seemed to give to the situation a lonely solemnity which they had not looked for.

On Tuesday some dray-loads of new machinery arrived at the Works; and these the pickets attempted to stop, but without success. Gibbons, on being consulted, took a sensible and liberal view of the matter.

'Let them put in all the new machinery they wish. That will mean employment for more men when we go back. We will not interfere with Sartwell until he tries to fill the Works with new men.'

For the remainder of the week the shops echoed with the clang of iron on iron, but no smoke came from the tall chimneys.

'Call this a fight?' said one of the men over his mug of beer; 'I call it a beanfeast.'

On Saturday strike pay was given out at headquarters, each man getting—not indeed his usual wage, but still a comfortable sum—for the Union was rich. It was truly a beanfeast—all pay and no work.

The first week had enabled Sartwell to make repairs and to add machinery that had long been needed; but it had another effect, which he considered

more important still. It allowed Mr. Monkton and Mr. Hope time to recover their second wind as it were. These good but timorous men had been panic-stricken by the going out of their employés, and by the adverse comments of the Press. As nothing happened during the week, they gradually regained what they called their courage; and, although they perhaps did not realize it, they were more and more committed to the fight, which was now actually begun. They could hardly with decency, after keeping silence for a week, during which there was peace, give way afterwards should there be violence.

The vigilance of the pickets, perhaps, relaxed a little as time went on and there was nothing to do, but one morning they had a rude awakening. When they arrived at the gates they saw smoke once more pouring from the chimneys; there was a hum of machinery; the Works were in full blast. But the former workers were outside the walls.

The news spread quickly, and the men gathered to the gates from all quarters. Gibbons was early on the ground, like an energetic general ready to lead his men in the fray. He saw that the fight was now on, and he counselled moderation when he spoke to the excited men. It was all right, he answered them; he had expected this and was prepared for it.

The gates remained closed, and when Gibbons asked admittance to speak with the manager, his request was curtly refused. This refusal did not tend to allay the excitement, or to improve the temper of the men. The police kept the throng on the move as much as possible, but the task became more and more difficult as its numbers increased.

At noon a van, evidently loaded with provisions, drove down the street; and when the mob learned that its destination was the Works, a cry went up that the vehicle should be upset. Again the pacifying influence of Gibbons made itself felt; and the van,

amid the jeers of the bystanders, drove in, the gates being promptly closed after it.

Gibbons retired with his captains to head-quarters, where a consultation was held. There was a chance that Sartwell, during the first week, when he was supposed to be putting in new machinery, had also been building dormitories for his new workers, and that he was going to keep them inside the gates, free from the influence of the Union. This plan had not been foreseen by Gibbons, and he was unprepared for it.

'Well, they must come out sooner or later, and when they do we will have a talk with them,' said the secretary. 'My own opinion is that they will come out to-night at the usual hour, and I propose to act on that supposition. If I find I am wrong, we will meet again to-night, and I may have some proposals to make. In a short time we shall be able to learn whether the "scabs" are coming out or not. There is no mystery about their getting in. Sartwell has evidently chartered a steamer, and landed them at high tide on the river front of the Works. Meanwhile, you get back among our own men, and advise them not to make any hostile demonstration when the blacklegs appear; and when they do come out, let each man of you persuade as many as you can to come to the big hall, where we can have a talk with them. Tell our men that if there is any violence they will merely be playing into Sartwell's hands. We don't want the police down on us, and, until there is a row, they will at least remain neutral.'

This advice commended itself to all who heard it, and, the details of the programme having been arranged, they all departed for the scene of conflict.

Promptly at six o'clock the gates were thrown open, and, shortly after, the 'blacklegs' began to pour forth into the street. There were no hootings or jeerings;

but the strikers regarded the new-comers with scowling looks, while the latter seemed rather uncomfortable, many of them evidently apprehensive regarding their reception.

'Men,' cried Gibbons, 'who is your leader? I want a word with him.'

The stream of humanity paused for a moment in spite of the commands of the police to move along. The men looked at one another, and Gibbons quickly recognized the state of things—they were strangers to each other, coming as they did from all parts of England. This surmise was confirmed by one man who spoke up.

'We've got no leader,' he said.

'Then you be the spokesman,' cried Gibbons. 'Did you men know, when you came here, that there was a strike on?'

'Something of that sort,' replied the spokesman, sullenly.

'Do you belong to a Union?'

'The Union never did nowt for us.'

'Do you know that you are taking bread from the mouths of other workers?'

'We must put bread into our own mouths.'

At this point the police sergeant touched Gibbons on the shoulder.

'I can't allow this obstruction,' he said.

'Give me two minutes,' pleaded Gibbons.

'No, nor one.'

Gibbons turned savagely upon him.

'Look here,' he cried. 'Have some tact and sense. Don't you know that I have merely to raise my hand and this crowd will sweep you and your men off the face of the earth?'

'That won't prevent me from sweeping you into prison.'

'Certainly not. But you can arrest me quietly when you like, or I'll meet you at the police-station

any hour you name; if you attempt to interfere now, you'll have a riot on your hands. *I'm* holding this crowd in check; it is not their fear of you. There's no traffic coming through this street, or likely to come. We're therefore obstructing nothing, and I'm as anxious as you are to keep the men within the law. Good heavens! you may have your hands full at any moment, so don't push patient people over the line. Remember, you are not in Sartwell's employ. I only want a few words with these men; then we'll leave the street to you.'

The sergeant hesitated a moment. It was an ominous mob.

'Look sharp, then,' he said, stepping back.

'Come with us,' cried Gibbons; 'we can't talk here. Come to the big hall, and if you don't like what we say, there will be no harm done. This is a free country.'

The secretary turned as if he had no doubt that the crowd would follow, and the leaderless men walked after him. Gibbons' assistants mixed with them and talked persuasively to the strangers. Then it was found that Gibbons had been right in his surmise; the new men had been brought into the Works by the river front! Before half an hour all the 'blacklegs' were in the Salvation Army hall, signing the Union roll and being put on the strike-pay list.

It was a notable triumph for Gibbons—first blood, as a sporting man would say.

Next morning when the gates were opened not a man entered, and Sartwell once more found himself without an employé. After the gates had remained invitingly open for half an hour, they were closed again, and a great cheer went up as the two big iron-bolted leaves came together.

Sartwell's resources, however, were not yet exhausted. Two days later the factory was thronged

with workmen once more, and these also Gibbons bought for the Union, in spite of the manager.

Thus the game went on, and it convinced the men that their secretary knew a thing or two, being more than a match for the manager. Gibbons carried himself confidently, and talked with a grand assurance which he was perhaps far from feeling, for he became more and more haggard and anxious as the fight continued. He alone knew the seriousness of the increased drain on the sources of the Union, through the enforced support of the new hands whom he had lured away from Sartwell's employ, and which had upset all his previous calculations.

An attempt had been made to lighten the burden by persuading the new men to return to their homes; and this had been partially successful with the first lot; but the others obstinately insisted on getting their share of the strike pay, and refused even to consider the advisability of returning. They demanded what was promised them, and in default threatened to re-enter the Works in a body, which action would have speedily put an end to the contest.

Gibbons was well supported by that section of the Press which gave more than a few lines each day to the progress of the strike. One morning the chief of these newspapers came out with an appeal to the public for aid. The case of the strikers, battling, it might be, first for their own rights, but fighting in reality for all working humanity, was most convincingly and tersely put in a 'double-leaded' leader, and the journal itself headed the list with a handsome contribution. Would the people of England hold aloof, and reduce these workers to slaves, using the weapon of grim starvation against them? The journal did not believe such apathy existed, and its belief was amply justified, for subscriptions poured rapidly in, together with indignant letters from all parts of the country, which were duly printed in its columns.

The first pinch of the strike came on the men when it was suddenly announced that strike pay would the next Saturday be cut down to one quarter the amount they were then receiving. There was a good deal of grumbling and many inquiries as to what they were fighting for; but on the whole the disastrous proclamation was received quietly, if somewhat grimly.

'We are bound to win,' said Gibbons, when he was reluctantly compelled to tell the men of the reduction. 'The firm is losing nearly a thousand pounds a week by the factory remaining idle, and it is not likely they will stand that long, even to oblige Sartwell.'

Gibbons had not the courage to add that, even with the reduction, the Union could not hold out more than a week longer; that it was practically at the end of its resources, and that future strike pay would have to depend on the subscriptions received from outside—a most precarious source of revenue, for every one knows how short-lived enthusiasm is, and how the collection of hard cash destroys it.

There is much in good generalship, and one of its axioms is that you should endeavour to discover your enemy's weakest point. Never once did it dawn on Gibbons or any of his lieutenants that the fortress they were attacking had only to be approached in one direction, when the walls would crumble like those of Jericho.

Never did it occur to him that Sartwell was fighting, at the same time, two battles, one with the men and one with the masters; and of the two contests he feared the result of the latter most. Sartwell was between two fires; he had urged both Monkton and Hope to quit England until the struggle was over, and leave the conducting of it to him. They vacillated; in the evening Sartwell would have their promise, but in the morning they had changed what they were pleased to call their minds. They always feared the worst. They saw the factory in flames and the mob

shot down by troops. They implored Sartwell to come to some agreement with the men; he had said the strike would be over in three weeks, and here it was still dragging on, the men as determined as ever. If he were wrong about the duration of the fight, might he not be wrong also in his treatment of the men? Was no compromise possible?

This sort of thing Sartwell had to contend with, and it wearied him more than the strike itself. He opened the newspapers in daily fear that he would find there some letter from the firm in answer to the strictures of the day before, which would show the public at once how the land lay.

Gibbons believed the backbone of a fight was money —as in many cases it is; but a moment's reflection might have shown him that if the contest was to be conducted on a financial basis the strikers had not the ghost of a chance, because the firm of Monkton and Hope was much richer than the Union. He believed in fighting the devil with fire. Adages are supposed to represent the condensed wisdom of the ages, whereas they too often represent condensed foolishness. If one has to meet an expert swordsman on the field of honour, he should select a pistol if he has the choice of weapons. Fight the devil if you like, but never with fire.

When Marston had said to Gibbons, 'Mr. Sartwell knows to a penny how much you have in the bank,' the secretary had answered grandly that Sartwell might see the books of the Union for all he cared, and much good might it do him. The fact that a man like Sartwell thought it worth his while to find out what the enemy was doing, did not suggest to Gibbons that it might not be a bad plan to have a look over Sartwell's shoulders, and discover just how things were going in the privacy of the manager's office. When Marston ferreted out various things as the fight progressed, and brought his information to Gibbons,

the latter waved it aside as of no consequence, treating Marston throughout as an enemy in the camp.

Timid little Mr. Hope passed through the gates each day to his office, scarcely ever glancing at the crowd, which hooted him and made remarks not pleasant to hear. He dreaded the moment of arriving and that of leaving, but thought it courageous to keep up his daily attendance, imagining he would be neglecting his duties as a free-born Briton if he deserted his post at this time of danger.

If Gibbons had been a shrewd man, he would have called upon Mr. Hope at Surbiton; and ten minutes' conversation there would have shown him the true state of affairs, for the timid little manufacturer was as transparent as crystal. If the secretary had lured one of the partners to the strikers' place of meeting, which might have been accomplished as easily as with the 'blacklegs' from the country, he would in all probability have secured a public statement which would have made Sartwell's resignation inevitable. Thus might Gibbons have led his army to victory, and at the same time have placed his enemy where his army then was—outside the gates. But Gibbons failed to do any of these things—chiefly because in a great factory, controlled as this was by a strong general manager, the men all knew the manager, but hardly one of them had ever spoken to the partners; and Gibbons was not even one of the workmen.

And to approach directly the members of the firm was merely one of the methods by which a clever general could have triumphed. If Gibbons had taken the trouble to inform himself about the effect which the few newspaper articles had produced in the minds of the partners, he would have endeavoured to make arrangements for the publication of a series of such articles, dealing with the well-known philanthropy of the firm, and containing some moral reflections about charity beginning at home. This undoubtedly would

have caused the ground to crumble away beneath the feet of Sartwell; for Monkton and Hope were proud of the good their benefactions were supposed to do; and, until this trouble had arisen, they had thought themselves just employers, who treated their men with fairness—as indeed they were, and as indeed they did.

Now they were in doubt about the matter, and had an uneasy feeling that they had been perhaps remiss in their duties towards their employés. Sartwell dominated them when he was in their presence; and they knew his value too well to run the risk of losing him. They knew also, that if they gave way to the men without his sanction, they would certainly lose him; and they had rivals in London who would be only too glad to take him into their employ; yet, in spite of this knowledge, they wavered, and it required but a little tact and diplomacy on the part of Gibbons to win a victory all along the line.

CHAPTER XI

SARTWELL showed no sign of the wear and tear of the struggle. He walked from the station to his office every morning at the usual hour, as if everything were going on to his entire satisfaction. He was always dressed with scrupulous neatness, and he invariably carried in his hand a trimly folded umbrella, which no one had ever seen him undo, for when it rained he took a cab. The umbrella seemed a part of him, and a purely ornamental part; he was never met in the street without it. No man could say when Sartwell purchased a new suit of clothes; each suit was precisely like the one which had preceded it, and it was always put on before its predecessor began to show signs of wear.

There was as little change in Sartwell's demeanour towards the men as there was in his clothes. He did not keep his eyes turned towards the ground as he passed along the street to the gates, nor was there, on the other hand, any belligerency in his manner. The men had gone out; that was their affair; he nodded to them or bade them a curt 'Good morning,' as had been his habit before the trouble. Few of them had the presence of mind to do otherwise than raise a finger to their caps; or to omit to answer with the customary mumble, 'Mornin', sir.' Habit is strong in the human animal, as has often been pointed out.

No one of all those concerned was more anxious for

the strike to end than Sartwell, but none the less was he determined that it should end in his way. He knew that there were openings in his armour, through which, with a blindness not to be explained by the manager, Gibbons neglected to thrust.

Curiously enough, it was not Gibbons whom Sartwell feared in this contest, but Marston. He knew the young man had been strongly against the strike, but he also knew that he had thrown in his lot with the men; and although the leaders of the strike, up to that time, had held aloof from Marston, pretending to look upon him as a covert traitor to the cause, still Sartwell feared that they might take him into their counsels at last, and that he would show them the way out of their difficulties.

The manager had made it his business to learn all he could of what was done by his opponents; and in this he had been amazingly successful. He knew of Marston's visit to Barney, and of the practically futile result of that conference; but he had such slight confidence in Barney's good sense that he feared some hint might have been dropped by the artist, which would show the men how anxious Monkton and Hope were for a settlement on almost any terms. As time passed, and Sartwell saw that Gibbons still held Marston at arm's length, he became less and less anxious. Affairs were rapidly approaching a crisis when Marston's aid would be useless.

A few days after the announcement of the reduction in strike pay had been made, Sartwell, approaching the gates in the morning, saw Marston standing alone at the street corner. The manager had almost passed him without greeting on either side, when the elder man suddenly stopped, turned half round, and said, sharply,—

'On picket duty, Marston?'

'No, Mr. Sartwell.'

'Not in their confidence, perhaps?'

'I suppose I am neither in their confidence nor in yours, Mr. Sartwell.'

'Rather an uncomfortable position, is it not? I should like to be one thing or the other if I were in your place, Marston.'

'I am one thing. I am entirely with the men.'

'Perhaps in that case you are afraid to be seen talking with me? Some of the men might happen to pass this way.'

'I am not afraid to be seen speaking with anybody, Mr. Sartwell.'

'Ah, you are young; therefore you are brave. I have known a smaller thing than this conversation to cost a man his life; but perhaps times and methods have changed since my early days. It is a pity you are on the wrong side for your bravery to be appreciated. The masters in these days always value talent and courage, and pay well for them. The men do neither. That is why they are usually beaten in a fight, and it is one of the many reasons why they should be. I have a few words to say to you: the street corner is not a good place for a private conversation; will you come to my office in an hour's time?'

'Do you wish to speak about the strike?'

'Yes,' said Sartwell, looking with some intentness at the young man. 'We have no other subject of mutual interest that I know of.'

'Very good. I merely asked, because whatever you may have to tell me I shall use in the interests of the men.'

Sartwell shrugged his shoulders.

'You are quite welcome,' he said, 'to make what use you please of the information which I shall give you. I am well aware that your advice is in demand by the men and their leaders.'

The elder man walked briskly on; the younger reddened at the hidden sneer in his last remark.

'God!' he cried in sudden rage. 'How I would like to fight that man!'

Marston turned and walked rapidly to the strike head-quarters. There he found Gibbons and the committee in consultation, while a few of the men lounged about the place. The talk ceased as Marston entered the room; the committee and its chairman looking loweringly at him.

'What do you want?' asked Gibbons, shortly.

'I met Mr. Sartwell a moment ago, in the street, and he said he had something to tell me about the strike. He asked me to call at his office in an hour's time. I promised to do so, but told him that any information he gave to me I should use in the interests of the men.'

'And so you came here, I suppose, to get some information to give in return?'

Marston had resolved not to allow himself to be taunted into anger, but he saw he had no easy task before him. He was going to do his duty, he said to himself, and help his comrades if he could; the situation was too serious for recrimination.

'No. I shall tell him nothing. If he wants information I shall refer him to you. I thought perhaps he might say something that would be of value for us to know, and so I came to tell you that I am going to his office.'

'Us? Whom do you mean by us?'

'The men on strike. I am on strike as well as the others. I have lost a situation even if you haven't,' retorted the young man, knowing as he spoke that he was not keeping to his resolution.

'Well,' said Gibbons, taking no notice of the other's insinuation, 'you don't need to come here for permission to visit Sartwell's office. I suppose you have often been there before.'

'I have not been there since the strike began.'

'Oh, haven't you?'

'No, I haven't. Do you mean to assert that I have?'

'I assert nothing. It merely seems strange that you should come bawling here, saying you are going to consult Sartwell. It has nothing to do with us. Go and come as you please, for all I care.'

The members of the committee murmured approval of the chairman's firm stand, and Marston, seeing that there was little use in further delay, turned on his heel and left them. The men lounging round the door nodded to him in a friendly manner as he went out, and the committee presumably continued its deliberations, untroubled by the interruption.

The young man walked down the street, looking neither to the right nor to the left, sick at heart, rather than angry, with the fatuous pettiness of Gibbons' resentment, who would rather wound and humiliate a man he disliked, than accept help when it was freely offered.

'How different,' said Marston to himself, 'is the conduct of Sartwell. He has more cause to detest me than Gibbons has, yet he asks me to confer with him. He does not despise the smallest card in his hand, while Gibbons may be throwing away a trump; if I were mean enough, and traitor enough, to the men, I would refuse to tell what I may learn. Sartwell, parting with me in anger, hails me in the street, merely because he thinks he can use me to serve his employers. That he likes me no better than he did when I left him, is shown by the sting in his talk; yet he puts down his personal feelings, hoping to win a trick; while Gibbons, the fool, although approached in a friendly way, does his sneaking little best to drive a man over to the enemy. I wonder what Sartwell wants to discover? I'll tell him nothing; but what a man he is to fight for—or against!'

'Hold hard, youngster. Where are you going?' cried the picket at the gate.

'I'm going to see Mr. Sartwell.'

'Oh no, you're not.'

'It's all right, mate; I've just come from headquarters. I am going with the committee's consent, and Gibbons' permission.'

'What's on?' asked the picket, in a whisper, while others of the strikers crowded round. 'Is the game up? Are we going to give in?'

'There's nothing new. I'll know more when I come out. Perhaps Sartwell has something to propose; we haven't.'

The men drew back with a simultaneous sigh, which may have indicated relief, or perhaps disappointment. The sternness of their resolution to hold out did not increase under reduced strike pay. Their organization was disintegrating, rotting; each man knew it, and was suspicious of his comrades. The heart had gone out of the fight.

Marston, crossing the deserted and silent yard, mounted the stairs and rapped at the manager's door. He found Sartwell alone, standing at his desk, with some papers before him.

'Now, Marston,' began the manager, briskly, turning from his desk. 'You think I've asked you here to learn something from you, and you have firmly resolved to tell me nothing. That's right. I like to see a man stick to his colours. We save the ship if we can; if she sinks, we go down with her. You may be surprised then to know that I am not going to ask you a single question. That will relieve your mind and enable you to give full attention to what I have to tell you. I hope, however, that you will keep your word and remember the promise you made me a short time since in the street.'

'What promise?'

'Have you forgotten it? Perhaps you thought it was a threat. You said you would give the men the information you received. I hold you to that. To

tell Gibbons is not necessarily to tell the men. You said you would let the men know.'

'I will repeat your conversation to Gibbons and the committee.'

'Ah, that's not what you said. Neither Gibbons nor the committee was mentioned in our talk this morning.'

'As near as I can recollect, I said I would use what information I received in the interests of the men.'

'Quite so. I am as anxious about the men's welfare as you are, and what I have to say to you must reach them. If you tell it to Gibbons and the committee, and if they do not pass it on to the men—as they will take precious good care not to do—I shall then learn whether you are a man of your word or not. The strikers meet to-night at the Salvation Hall. If Gibbons does not inform them what he will then know, I shall expect you to stand up in your place and add to the enlightenment of the situation. When you were here last, I showed you a sheet of paper, at the top of which was written the resources, for the moment, of the Union. The remainder of the sheet was blank, but it is now filled up. It shows the expenditure week by week up to the last payment made to those on strike. If you cast your eye over this sheet you will see that the Union is now bankrupt.'

'If that is all you have to tell me, Mr. Sartwell, it is no news. The men already know they are depending on public subscriptions.'

'And they still believe in Gibbons as a leader?'

'Yes.'

'Very good. Now I come to what is news—news to you, to Gibbons, and to the men. Most of this money has gone to loafers from the East End of London. I had such unlimited confidence in Gibbons' foolishness and in the stupidity of the committee, that I have sent through the gates, to become members of

your Union, not skilled artisans like you, but half-trained labourers who never were apprenticed to any trade, but picked up a smattering of it by carrying the tools of the real mechanic, and looking on while he did the work;—unfortunate wretches who were out of work and willing to absorb strike pay merely on condition that they would keep their mouths shut. It never seemed to occur to Gibbons that, if I were able to fill up the Works with men transported to our river steps on a steamer, I could either have fed and lodged them here, or taken them back and forth in the same way they came. He gathered them into the Union with eagerness, which was just what I expected him to do; but he never tried to find out whether they were genuine workmen or not.'

'You mean, then, that by a trick you have bankrupted the Union!'

Sartwell shrugged his shoulders.

'Call it a trick if you like. A strike is war; you must not expect it to be fought with rose leaves. But apart from that, I have borne in mind the real interests of the men. I could have filled the Works with competent men—yes, ten times over. If I had done so, where would the strikers be at the end of the fight? Some would be in prison; some would have broken heads; all would be out of employment. I want my own men back here. I want them to understand they have got a fool for a leader. They have had a nice little play spell; they have eaten and drunk their money; the holiday has come to an end. If they return to work now, there is work for them; if they delay much longer, I shall fill the shops with genuine workmen, and the Union has no money now to bribe them with.'

'If I tell the men all this there will be a riot. They will mob the bogus workmen who have taken their money.'

'Oh no, they won't. I have told the bogus work-

men just how long the money would continue to be paid if they held their tongues. With last week's reduced payment the loafers have scattered. The men may mob Gibbons, and I think he richly deserves it.'

'They will be much more likely to attack you.'

'They are welcome to try it. Now, I think that is all I have to say, Marston. I have required no answers from you, and I imagine I have given you some interesting information. I am ready to get to work, with the former employés of the firm, or without them, just as they choose. The best friend of the men will be he who advises them to stop this foolish strike and buckle down to business once more.'

CHAPTER XII

THE works of Messrs. Monkton and Hope were situated in the parish of St. Martyrs'-in-the-East. The church of St. Martyrs' afforded a very good living to its vicar and a somewhat poorer one to its organist. Albert Langly was the organist; and just now he found himself compelled to search for a cheaper lodging. The thin young man bitterly regretted that good money had to be wasted on food, clothes, and rent. A person cannot live without food; Langly had tried it, not as an economical experiment, but largely through forgetfulness, and he found, to his astonishment, that hunger actually forced itself upon his attention, after a sufficient lapse of time. The changeable English climate, not to mention the regulations of that moral body, the police force, compelled him to cover himself; and a room he needed mainly to keep his stacks of music dry.

Langly never applied to his vicar for more remuneration, because deep down in his musical soul he knew he was already taking advantage of the generosity of the church authorities, and he lived in constant fear that some day they would discover this and righteously dismiss him. To be allowed to play on that splendid instrument, erected at the cost of a fabulous amount of money, was a privilege which he felt he ought to pay for, if he were the honest man the churchwardens thought him to be.

He tried to soothe his troubled conscience by telling it that he would refuse to take money were it not that sheet music was so dear, even when bought from the man who gave the largest discount in London, to whose shop Langly tramped miles once a week; but thus the guilty have ever endeavoured to lull the inward monitor, well knowing while they did so the sophistry of their excuses.

The consciousness of deceit told on Langly's manner; he cringed before the vicar and those in authority. Never did one of the kindly but deluded men accost their organist without causing a timorous fear to spring up in his heart that the hour of his dismissal had arrived. Yet, let moralists say what they will, the wicked do prosper sometimes on this earth when they should not, while the innocent suffer for the misdeeds done by others.

There was the case of Belcher, for example, and although it must in justice be admitted that Belcher's hard luck caused the organist many twinges of conscience, still, of what avail are twinges of conscience when the harm is wrought? If, in our selfishness, we bring disaster on a fellow-creature, after-regret can scarcely be called reparation.

Belcher was the hard-working, industrious man who pumped wind into the organ in St. Martyrs', and, besides labouring during the regular service, it was also his duty to attend when the organist wished to practise the selections which afterwards delighted the congregation. This was Belcher's grievance. Langly had no 'mussy,' as the overworked pumper told his sympathizing comrades at the Rose and Crown. He would rather follow the vestry cart all day with a shovel, would Belcher, than suffer the slavery he was called upon to endure by the unthinking organist, who never considered that bending the back to a lever was harder work than crooking the fingers to the keys. Besides, Langly could sit

down to his labour, such as it was, while Belcher could not.

Naturally, the put-upon man complained, and Langly at once admitted the justice of the complaint, at the same time exhibiting a craven fear lest a rumour of his unjustifiable conduct might reach the ears of the church authorities. The honest Belcher now regretted that he had borne his burden so long, for the reprehensible organist immediately offered to compound with the blower by paying him something extra each week, if he would say nothing about the additional labour.

It was Belcher's misfortune rather than his fault that mathematical computation was not one of his acquirements, and he failed to appreciate the fact that there was a limit to the musician's income; a limit very speedily reached. Belcher was an ill-used man, and he knew it, so he struck often for higher pay and got it, up to the point where Langly found there was not enough left to keep body and soul together, not to speak of the purchase of music.

Belcher yearned for the tail of the vestry cart, and threatened to complain to the vicar, which at last he did—not mentioning, however, that he had received extra remuneration, because he did not wish to exhibit the organist's culpability in all its repulsiveness. He told the vicar that he would rather accompany the vestry cart in its rounds than accompany an organist who had no 'mussy' on a 'pore' man. He was always ready to pump a reasonable quantity of air, but if an organist knew his trade so badly that he needed to practise so much, it was hard that the man at the lever should bear the brunt of his incompetence. The clergyman thanked Belcher for his musical criticism, and said he would see about it.

While the virtuous Belcher took his walks abroad with his chin in the air, as befits one who has done his duty, the transgressor crept along byways and

scarcely dared to enter the silent church. He dodged the vicar as long as he could, but was at length run to earth. The kindly old man put his hand on the culprit's shoulder, and said,—

'You have been overworking Belcher, I hear.'

'I shall be more thoughtful in future, sir,' murmured the nervous organist, in excuse. 'I'm afraid I've been playing too much, but it is a difficult art——'

'Of course it is,' interrupted the clergyman. 'I have made arrangements to satisfy the ambition of Belcher, which appears to tend in the direction of a vestry cart; and we have ordered a hydraulic blower which we should have put in years ago. You will find it a great convenience in your practice, Mr. Langly, for it is always ready and never complains.'

The organist tried to thank the vicar, but his throat seemed not at his command for other effort than a gulp or two. The good man smiled at the grotesque twistings of Langly's mouth and the rapid winking of his eyelids; then the organist turned abruptly and walked away, tortured afterwards by the fear that the vicar might have thought him rude and ungrateful; but the old man knew the musician much better than the musician knew himself.

After that, when Langly chanced upon the indignant and gravely wronged Belcher at the tail of his oft-mentioned, but entirely unexpected, cart, the young man shrank from the encounter, and felt that inward uneasiness which is termed a troubled conscience.

'Call that Christianity!' Belcher would say to his mate, when their rounds took them near St. Martyrs', 'a-puttin' a squirtin' water-pump in there, to tyke th' bread out o' a pore man's mouth, an' a-cuttin' down o' 'is livin' wyge! Yus, an' the lawr a-forcin' us to support the Church, too.'

But Belcher was really of a forgiving spirit, and should not be judged by his harsh language towards

the establishment which he was under the impression a rigorous legal enactment compelled him to subsidize, for he so far overlooked Langly's conduct as to call upon him occasionally and accept a few pence as conscience money.

'I don't blime 'im,' said Belcher, magnanimously, over his pot of beer, 'as much as I do the mean old duffer wot preaches there; 'e put me on the cart.'

Langly, as has been said, found it necessary to secure cheaper lodgings, and this was his own fault as much as it was the fault of his limited income. A London landlady in the more impoverished districts carries on a constant fight against circumstances. Her tenants pay her as seldom and as little as they can; sometimes they disappear, and she loses her money; while, if they stay, there are no chances of extracting extras, those elastic exactions which often waft a West-End boarding-house keeper to affluence.

The organist's conduct towards his numerous and successive landladies admits of no defence. These good women, when he had taken his departure, spoke bitterly of his sneaky and deceptive ways, as indeed it would appear that they had cause to do. On first arriving at a new place, he was so apologetic and anxious not to give any trouble; so evidently a person who did not really live in bustling, elbowing London, but in some dreamy, mental world of his own, that his good hostess, merely as an experiment and entirely without prejudice, as the legal man puts it, tentatively set down in his bill for the week some trifling item which, strictly speaking, was merely placed there to be taken off again if complaint were made, or was allowed to stand if overlooked.

Of course, under these circumstances the landlady was in expectation of a row, during which epithets reflecting upon her financial probity might be hurled at her; when she, with voluble excuses for her unfortunate mistake, would correct the error and assure

the lodger that such a thing would not occur again. After a few essays of this kind, all perfectly just and proper in a commercial country, and, in fact, the only means of discovering to what extent the lodger could be depended upon as an asset, life would flow on with that calm serenity which adds so much to the comfort and enjoyment of a furnished apartment in the Borough or a palace overlooking the Park.

But Langly never took a straightforward course with his landladies. Instead of finding fault at the proper time, he meekly said nothing and paid the bills as long as he was able—bills which mounted higher and higher each week. Thus the deluded woman had no chance, as she could not be expected to know when she had reached the limit of his weekly income. At last, the organist would take his bundle of music under his arm, and would sneak away like a thief in the night to search for a cheaper abode; after leaving a week's money in lieu of notice, wrapped in a piece of paper, in a conspicuous place; for he never had the courage to face a landlady and boldly tell her he was going.

In Rose Garden Court there was more than one family circle that might be likened to an accordion, because of the facility with which it could be compressed or extended. The Scimmins household could occupy the three rooms it rented in the court, or it could get along with two, or even one if need be. The spare space was sub-let whenever opportunity offered; and here Langly found lodging that had at least the merit of cheapness.

The policeman at the entrance of the court looked suspiciously after the new-comer, and resolved to keep an eye on him. The organist had a habit of muttering truculently to himself as he walked along the streets; and his nervous hands were never a moment at rest, the long, slim fingers playing imaginary keys or chords inaudible outside of his own musical imagination.

When the already suspicious policeman at the entrance of the court saw the musician come out, clawing the empty air with the two forefingers of either hand crooked like talons, a fearful frown on his brow, and an ominous muttering in his throat, the officer said to himself,—

'There goes a hanerchist, if ever there was one,' not knowing that the poor little man was merely pulling out the stops of a mythical organ, immense in size and heavenly in tone. The police always looked askance at Langly when he moved into a new locality, until they learned that he was merely the organist at St. Martyrs'-in-the-East.

One night, shortly after he took the back room two flights up at No. 3, Langly came down the common stair-way, and paused in amaze at the landing opposite Braunt's door. He heard some one within slowly and fearfully murdering Chopin's 'Funeral March,' Part First. The sound made him writhe; and he crouched by the door, his fingers mechanically drumming against the panel, repressing with difficulty a desire to cry out against the profanation of a harmony that seemed sacred to him.

The drone stopped suddenly; and next instant the door was jerked open, causing the amazed listener to stumble into the room, where, as it seemed to him, a giant pounced down, clutched his shoulders, and flung him in a heap on the floor by the opposite wall. Then kicking the door shut, the giant, with fists clenched and face distorted with rage, towered over the prostrate man.

'Ye miserable, sneakin' scoundrel!' cried Braunt. 'So that's why ye took a room with Scimmins—to ferret and spy on me. Ah've seen ye crawlin' oop these stairs afraid to look any honest man in the face. Because Ah took no strike pay Gibbons wants to know how Ah live, does he? Ah'm oop to his tricks. Ye're Gibbons' spy, and he has sent ye to live with that

other sneak Scimmins. Scimmins himself was afraid, for he knows already the weight o' ma hand. Now,' continued Braunt, rolling up his sleeves, 'Ah'll serve ye as Ah did Scimmins. Ah'll throw ye over the banisters, and ye can report that to Gibbons, and tell him to coom himself next time, and Ah'll break ivery bone in his body.'

Jessie clung to her father, begging him in tears not to hurt the poor man. Braunt shook her off, but not unkindly.

'Sit thee down, Jessie, lass, and don't worrit me. Ah'll but drop the bag o' bones on the stairs; and serve him right for a sneak.'

Langly, encouraged by his antagonist's change of tone in speaking to the girl, ventured to falter forth,—

'I assure you, sir——'

'Don't "sir" me, ye hound,' cried Braunt, turning fiercely upon him, 'and don't dare to deny ye are one o' Gibbons' spies. I caught ye at it, remember.'

'I'll deny nothing if it displeases you, but I never heard of Gibbons in my life, and I'm only a poor organist. I stopped at the door on hearing the harmonium. For no other reason, I assure you. I know I oughtn't to have done it, and I suppose I am a sneak. I'll never do it again, never, if you will excuse me this time.'

There was something so abject in the musician's manner that Braunt's resentment was increased rather than diminished by the appeal. He had a big man's contempt for anything small and cringing.

'Oh, ye're an organist, are ye? Likely story. Organists don't live in Garden Court. But we'll see; we'll see. Get oop.'

Langly gathered himself together and rose unsteadily to his feet. Every movement he made augmented the other's suspicion.

'Now,' said Braunt, with the definite air of a man

who has his opponent in a corner, 'sit thee down at the harmonium and play. Ye're an organist, remember.'

'Yes,' protested Langly; 'but I don't know that I can play on such an instrument at all. I play a church organ.'

'An organ's an organ, whether it is in church or oot. If ye can play the one, ye can play the other.'

The young man hesitated, and was nearly lost. Braunt's fingers itched to get at him, and probably only the presence of the girl had restrained him so far.

'Have you any music?' asked Langly.

'No, we haven't. She plays by ear.'

'Will you allow me to go upstairs and bring some sheet music?'

This was a little too transparent.

'Now, ba God!' cried Braunt, bringing his fist down on the table, 'stand there chattering another minute and Ah'll break thy neck down the stairs. Sit thee down, Jessie, an' don't interfere. The man plays or he doesn't. I knew he was a liar, an' he quakes there because it's to be proven. Now, coward, the organ or the stairs—make thy choice quickly.'

The musician reluctantly took the chair before the instrument. He had played on a harmonium in his early days, and knew it was harsh and reedy at the best. But under his gentle touch the spirit of all the harmonies seemed to rise from it and fill the squalid room. Braunt stood for a moment with fallen jaw, his hands hanging limply by his sides, then he sank into his arm-chair; Jessie gazed steadfastly, with large, pathetic eyes, at their guest, who seemed himself transformed, all the lines of dismay and apprehension smoothed away from his face, replaced by an absorbed ecstasy, oblivious of every surrounding.

He played symphony after symphony, one apparently suggesting and melting into another, until at last a minor chord carried the music into the solemn rhythm of Chopin's March. Then the har-

monium, like a sentient creature, began to sob and wail for the dead. The girl's eyes, never moving from the wizard of the keys, filled with unshed tears, and her father buried his face in his hands.

When at last the organist's magic fingers slipped from the keys, and the exultant light faded from his face as the dying music merged into silence, Braunt sprang to his feet.

'Curse me for a brutish clown,' he cried, 'to think that Ah mishandled thee, lad, and thou playest like an angel. Ah niver heard music before.'

He laid his huge hand on the other's shoulder—gently and kindly—although the youth, hardly yet awake from his dream, timidly shrank from the touch.

'Forgive me, lad. Ah misdoubt Ah hurt thee.'

'No, no. It is all as nothing, if you like the music.'

'The music! Ah shall niver forget it; niver. That March will ring in ma head all day. The whole world seems trampin' to it.'

The young man for the first time looked up at him, the light of brotherhood in his eyes.

'I feel it, too,' he said, 'that there is nothing around us but good music. It smooths away the ruder sounds of earth, or uses them as undertones—as—as a background. I sometimes fancy that the gates of Heaven are left ajar, and we—a few of us—are allowed to listen, to compensate us for any trouble we have, or to show us the triviality of everything else.'

The young man's thin face flushed in confused shame at finding himself talking thus to another man, although what he said was merely the substance of many a former soliloquy. With a hasty, apologetic glance at the girl, who regarded him like one in a trance, with wide, unwinking eyes, Langly continued, hurriedly,—

'The March is a difficult one, and should not be attempted as a whole, except after many lessons.

I shall be pleased to teach your daughter, if you will allow me. She has a correct ear.'

Braunt shook his head.

'We've no money for music lessons,' he said.

'I have very little myself. I am poor, and, therefore, need none,' said the organist, as if that were a logical reason. 'The poor should help the poor. If they don't, who else will? The poor have always been kind to me.' He thought of his many landladies, and how they had robbed themselves to sustain him, as they had often admitted, little thinking he would desert them one by one. 'Aye, and the rich too,' he added, remembering the hydraulic motor in the church, and the continued endurance of the authorities with their organist.

'Well, lad,' said Braunt, with a sigh, 'coom in when ye can, and if nowt else ye'll be sure of a hearty North Country welcome.'

CHAPTER XIII

SARTWELL prided himself on being a man who made few mistakes. He was able to trace an event from cause to effect with reasonable certainty; and this slight merit made him, perhaps, a trifle impatient with others who could not be credited with similar foresight, as his own wife would not have hesitated to bear witness. It would probably have filled that just woman with subdued, if pardonable, gratification had she known how wide of the mark her husband was in his estimate of the result on the strikers of the news he had committed to the care of Marston.

Sartwell imagined that the men, in their fury at being outwitted, would turn on Gibbons and rend him. He believed that Gibbons would not dare to tell his dupes, as Sartwell persisted in calling them, how the Union had been befooled into supporting for weeks the bogus workmen whom the manager had flung into its lap. After wreaking their vengeance on Gibbons and deposing him, they must return to the Works, reasoned the manager. Their money was gone, interest in the strike had all but died out, fresher events had compressed the reports of its progress into a short paragraph in the papers, subscriptions had practically ceased: what then was there left but a return, or starvation, that powerful ally of masters all the world over?

But Sartwell forgot that the Englishman knows how to starve. No Indian ever tightens his belt another notch with grimmer determination to compress hunger, than does an Englishman set his teeth and starve, if need be. He has starved on the ice near the Pole, and under the burning sun in the desert. He has met famine face to face in beleaguered fort with no thought of surrender; and has doled with scrupulous exactitude the insufficient portions of food, on a raft in mid-ocean. The poet has starved in his garret, making no outcry, and the world has said, 'If we had only known.' In the forests and on the plains, in the jungle and on the mountains, and perhaps worst of all, in the great cities, amidst plenty, the Englishman has shown he knows how to starve, saying with the poet—

'I have not winced nor cried aloud.'

When Gibbons heard what Marston had to tell, he promptly said, 'It is a lie'; but the committee looked one at the other with apprehension in their faces, fearing it was the truth.

'The question is,' said Marston, 'are you going to let the men know this?'

'Certainly, if I find it is true; but I don't believe a word of it. Perhaps you want to have the pleasure of being the bearer of bad news to the men?'

'I intend to tell them if you do not.'

'Of course. I'm sorry we can't gratify you.'

The committee dismissed Marston, and went into secret session; shortly afterwards separating to meet again in the evening, just before the large gathering in the Salvation Hall. In the interval Gibbons and his fellow-members made active search for the alleged fraudulent workmen, but they found none—the birds had flown. It was evident the word had been passed round; and that, fearing the vengeance of the legitimate claimants to the Union funds, the former

'blacklegs' had taken themselves off, out of the reach of possible harm.

When the committee met for the second time that day, the members were divided among themselves as to the advisability of taking the men fully into their confidence. Some thought it best to break the doleful news gradually; others that the worst should be known at once. Gibbons, however, said there was in reality no choice; the men must be told the whole truth, for if the committee tried any half measures, Marston would undoubtedly rise in his place and relate what Sartwell had told him. So to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth was resolved upon.

When Gibbons faced his audience that night in the large hall, he saw he had to deal with a body of men whose mood was totally different from that of the crowd which had light-heartedly voted, with a hurrah, to go on strike. There was now little jocularity among the men; they sat in their places in sullen silence. A feeling that something ominous was in the air seemed to pervade the hall; and as Gibbons stepped to the front of the platform, he felt that the moral atmosphere of the place was against him; that he had to proceed with great caution, or his hold on the men would be lost. He knew he was a good speaker, but he knew, also, that the men were just a trifle impatient with much talk and such small result from it all.

'Combination,' he began, 'is the natural consequence of the modern conditions of labour. A working-man of to-day may be likened to a single pipe in a large organ. He can sound but one note. He spends his life doing part of something. He does not begin any article of commerce, go on with it, and finish it, as did the workmen of former days; he merely takes it from a fellow-workman who has put a touch on it, puts his own touch on it, and passes it on to another; and

thus the article travels from hand to hand until it reaches the finisher. The workman of to-day is merely a small cog on a very large wheel, and so, if he does not combine with his fellows, he is helpless.

'The workman of former times was much more independent. He began his work and completed it. If he was a cooper he made the whole barrel; hooping it and heading it. If one of us may be compared to a single pipe in an organ, the workman of yesterday might be likened to a flute, on which a whole tune could be played. He——'

'Ah, chuck it!' cried a disgusted man in front. 'We don't want no philosophy; we wants strike pay, or marster's pay.'

Gibbons stood silent for a second or two.

'Yes,' he cried, his voice like a trumpet call. 'I *will* chuck it. This is not the time for philosophy, as our friend said; it is the time to act. When a man strips to fight, what does he expect?'

'A jolly good thrashing!' was the unlooked-for reply.

It is never safe for an orator to depend on his audience for answers to his questions, but the laugh that went up showed Gibbons that the meeting was getting into better humour, which was what he most desired.

'When an Englishman takes off his coat to fight,' continued Gibbons, 'he asks no favour from his opponent, but he does expect fair play; and if Englishmen are the onlookers he gets it, whether they like him or whether they don't. He doesn't expect to be struck below the belt; he doesn't expect to be strangled on the ropes; he doesn't expect to be hit when he is down. We stripped for a square and fair fight with manager Sartwell, and we have fought as men should. We have broken no law; we have raised no disturbance. The police, always eager enough to arrest a striker, have laid hands on none

of us. It has been a square, stand-up, honourable fight. It has been a fair fight on our side, and I am proud to have been connected with it. But in this struggle I have made one mistake. I made the mistake of thinking we were fighting an honourable opponent—a man who would not break the rules of the ring. I was not on the outlook for foul play—for trickery.

'Knowing what I do to-night, I say—and I am ready to take the consequences of my words—that Sartwell is a thief, and a cowardly thief, in the estimation of any honest man. He knew that the life of our fight was our money. He knew that starvation for the helpless wives and families of our men was his most powerful ally. He did not dare to break in and steal our money, because he was afraid of the law, but he took a meaner and more cowardly way of accomplishing the robbery. He appealed to the cupidity of men out of work—poor devils, I don't blame them; they were doubtless starving—and he told them that if they masqueraded as workmen of his, the Union would take them in, and pay them wages as long as there was no suspicion aroused—that is, if these men kept their mouths shut they could draw strike pay.

'Although I have never liked Sartwell, I did not think he would stoop to play us a trick like this. A man who robs a bank has some courage; but a man who tempts poverty-stricken wretches to commit the crime, while he stands safely aside and reaps the benefit—there is no decent word in the language to characterize him. Now, fellow-workers, you know what has been done, and the result is that our treasury is as empty as if Sartwell had broken into it with a jemmy. The manager is waiting expectantly for the proceeds of the burglary. He will throw the gates of the Works open to-morrow for you to enter and complete his triumph. The

question before the meeting to-night is, Are you going in?'

A universal shout of 'Never! We'll starve first!' rose to the rafters of the building.

When he first confronted the meeting that night Gibbons feared that he could not rouse the men from their evident coldness towards him. As the speech went on, increasing murmurs among the men, and at length savage outbursts of rage, showed him that he held them in the hollow of his hand; at the end, a word from him, and all the police in that part of London could not have saved the Works from wreck and flames. 'To the Works!' was the cry, and there was a general movement in response to it.

'No, no!' shouted Gibbons, his stentorian voice dominating the uproar. 'Not to the Works. Every man home to-night, but be on the ground in the morning. We must not play into the enemy's hands by any attempt at violence. To-morrow we will intercept Monkton and Hope, and demand our rights from them in person. Let them refuse at their peril. We'll have no more dealings with Sartwell.'

There was a cheer at this, and the meeting disbanded quietly. Next morning the men were out in force at the still closed gates, and there were angry threats against the manager. It was all right enough, they said, for Gibbons to counsel moderation, but the time for moderation was past. There was an increased body of police, who kept the crowd moving as much as was possible, having, for the first time during the strike, a most difficult task to perform. The strikers were in ugly temper, and did not obey orders or take pushes with the equanimity they had formerly displayed; but the police showed great forbearance, and evidently had instructions not to use their truncheons except as a last resort.

Sartwell, knowing a crisis was at hand, had slept in

his office, and the ever increasing mob hooted when he did not appear at his usual time.

Gibbons, by word and action, moving about everywhere, tried to keep his men in hand and prevent a conflict. They cheered him, but paid little attention to what he said.

Shortly after ten o'clock a hansom was driven up to the outskirts of the mob, and was received with a chorus of groans. Gibbons quickly stepped in front of it, and addressed the occupant.

'Mr. Hope,' he began.

'Stand back there,' cried the officer in charge.

'Mr. Hope,' cried Gibbons, 'I want ten words with you.'

Little Mr. Hope shrank into a corner of the hansom, speechless, his face white as a sheet of paper.

'Stand back, I say.' The officer pushed Gibbons, striking him with some force on the breast.

'Let him answer. Will you speak for one minute with your men—the men who have made you rich?'

'Stand back,' reiterated the officer, pushing him a step further.

The hansom moved inch by inch nearer the gates. The crowd seethed like an uneasy sea, and every man held his breath.

'Listen to me, Mr. Hope. Your men are starving. They ask only——'

The officer pushed the speaker back once more; Gibbons' heel caught on a cobble-stone, and he went down backwards.

The crowd broke like a wave, submerging the police for a moment, flooding the street as if a dam had given way. The driver on his lofty seat, trying to control his frightened horse, looked like a castaway perched on a buoy in an angry ocean. He made the tactical mistake of lashing round him with his whip. In an instant the hansom was over and down, with

a crash of splintering glass. The police, edging together, struck right and left with a fury that quite matched the less disciplined rage of the mob. The officers fought their way until there was a ring round the prostrate cab; two of them picked up Mr. Hope, who was helpless with fear and horror; and these two, with the little man between them, surrounded by a squad which stood shoulder to shoulder, simply clove their way through the dense mass to the gates, where the small door in the large gate was quickly opened and shut, with Mr. Hope and one supporting policeman inside.

Gibbons, his hat gone, his coat in rags, and his face smeared with blood—a wild, unkempt figure, rose above the struggling mob, and stood on the top of the fallen cab.

'For God's sake, men,' he screamed, 'don't resist the police. Fall back! Fall back!'

He might as well have shouted to the winds. The police laid about them like demons, and the crowd was rapidly falling back, but not because of Gibbons' orders. In an incredibly short space of time, the police in a body marched down the street, and there was none to oppose them. The remnants of what a few minutes before seemed an irresistible force, lay on the pavement and groaned, or leaned against the walls; the more seriously wounded to be taken to the hospitals, the others to the police-station.

In spite of their defeat in the morning, the men gathered once more about the Works in the afternoon, and the threatening crowd was even greater than before; because the evening papers had spread over London startling accounts of the riot, as they called it, and the news had attracted idlers from all parts of the Metropolis. The wildest rumours were afloat: the men were going to wreck the Works; they were going to loot the bread-shops in Light Street; they had armed themselves, and were about to march to

Trafalgar Square. With a resolute and desperate leader there is no saying what they might have attempted; but Gibbons, who had put another coat on his back and much sticking-plaster on his face, moved about counselling moderation and respect for the law. They would forfeit public sympathy, he said, by resorting to violence, although some of his hea[illegible] growled that 'a blooming lot o' good' public sympathy had done for them.

'What we want, and what we mean to have,' said Gibbons, 'is a word with the owners. They are bound to come out soon.'

They did come out ultimately together, and two more frightened men than Monkton and Hope it would have been hard to find in all England that day. They were surrounded by a dozen policemen, whose resolute demeanour showed that they were not to be trifled with. The gates immediately closed behind this formidable procession; and it quickly made its way up the street, the crowd jeering and groaning as it passed through.

'We've got nothing against them,' shouted one. 'Bring out Sartwell, and we'll show you wot for.'

Hatred of the manager rather than of the owners was plainly the dominant sentiment of the gathering. They cheered the remark, and gave three groans for the unpopular manager.

When the protected men disappeared, the vigilance of the force relaxed, and the crowd surged into the gap which the police had cleared. With the masters safe and out of reach, the critical moment of the day seemed to have passed. The police could not be expected to know that the real resentment of the mob was not directed against the man whose cab had been overturned that morning.

'I hope Sartwell won't venture out to-night,' said Marston to Braunt. 'It will take more than twelve policemen to guard him if he does.'

'He has some sense,' replied Braunt, 'and will stay where he is.'

Neither Braunt nor Marston had been present during the morning's battle; but they, like many others with nothing to do, had come in the afternoon.

As Braunt spoke the small door in the gate opened, and Sartwell, entirely alone, stepped out. He had no more formidable weapon in his hand than his customary slim and trim umbrella. His silk hat was as glossy and his clothes as spick and span as if they were upon a tailor's model. He seemed to have aged a trifle since the strike began; but his wiry, well-knit body was as erect as ever, and in his eye was that stern look of command before which, at one time or another, every man in his employ had quailed.

An instantaneous hush fell upon the crowd. The cry of a hawker in a distant street was heard. Every man knew that the flinging of a missile, or the upraising of an arm even, would be as a spark in a powder-mine. Let but one stroke fall, and all the police in London could not have saved the life of the man who was walking across the cleared space from the gates towards the crowd. The mass of silent humanity had but to move forward, and Sartwell's life would be crushed out on the paving-stones.

But the manager, without pause, yet without hurry, walked across the intervening area with evident confidence that the men would make way for him. There was no sign of fear in his manner, nor, on the other hand, was there any trace of swaggering authority about him; but there was in the glance of his steely eye and the poise of his head that indefinable something which stamps a man with the air of master; which commands obedience, instant and unquestioned.

The crowd parted before him, and he cast no look over his shoulder. Habit being strong, one or two

raised hand to forelock as he passed, getting in return the same curt nod with which Sartwell had always acknowledged such salutation. The human ocean parted before him as did the Red Sea before the Hebrew leader, and the manager passed through unscathed.

'God A'mighty!' cried Braunt, towering above his fellows and shaking his fist at the unoffending sky; 'Ah've seen in ma life one brave man.'

CHAPTER XIV

'COOM wi' me, Marston,' said Braunt. 'Let's get oot of this crowd; Ah want a word with ye.'

The two made their way to a quieter street, and walked together towards Rose Garden Court, talking as they went.

'This foolish strike'll ha' to stop,' began the Yorkshireman, 'and now's the time to stop it. The men be tired, and the marsters be sick, but neither'll give in; so a way must be found oot o' t' tangle, and ye're the man to find the way.'

'How? The men won't throw over Gibbons, and Sartwell will resign before he will confer with him. Remember how Gibbons swayed the men last night, in spite of the grumbling there had been against him before the meeting opened.'

'Yes, Ah know. But, ma lad, there's rooctions in the other camp as well's in ours. Sartwell's cooming oot as he did just now was as much in defiance of t' marsters as of t' men. If we knew the truth on't, both Monkton and Hope wanted him to coom with them and their bodyguard; but he wouldn't. From what Ah hear, Mr. Hope was so afeard this morning that he couldn't ha' spoken if his life had depended on't. There must ha' been some hot talk between the three to-day. Sartwell don't see the danger, and the two marsters don't see it neither. What

Ah'm sure of is, that there's a split between Sartwell and t' marsters, and when they hear that he came out alone to-night while they were guarded by twelve policemen, they'll be more angry than ever, if there's any spirit in either of them.

'Now, what ye must do to-morrow is to meet either Monkton or Hope, or both. Ye'll see they won't go near the Works again till this strike's ended. Ah'd go to Mr. Hope first; he's had the worst fright. Tell him ye want to end the trouble, and he'll listen willing enooph. Very likely he's some plan of his own which Sartwell won't let him try. If you get him to promise to give us what we want if we throw over Gibbons—we'll spring that on the meetin'; and you'll see, if we work it right, Gibbons will be thrown over. Then there'll be no trouble with Sartwell.'

'It seems a treacherous thing to do,' said Marston, with some hesitation.

'God's truth, lad,' cried Braunt, with some impatience, 'haven't they been treating ye like a traitor ever since this strike began? What's the difference, if't does look like treachery? Think of t' wives and bairns of t' men, if not of t' men themselves. Think of them that no one has given a thought to all these weeks, the women-workers in the top floor of the Works. They've had little strike pay. They ha' no vote at the meetin's, and they ha' to suffer and starve when they're willing to work. Treachery? Ah'd be a traitor a thoosand times over to see the Works goin' again.'

'I'll do it,' said Marston.

The young man had no money to waste on railway fare, so next morning early he set his face to the west and trudged along the Portsmouth Road the twelve miles' distance between London and Surbiton.

As he walked up the beautifully kept drive to the Hope mansion, he thought he saw the owner among

the trees at the rear, pacing very dejectedly up and down a path. Marston hesitated a moment, but finally decided to apply formally at the front door. The servant looked at him with evident suspicion, and, after learning his business, promptly returned, saying that Mr. Hope could not see him. The door was shut upon him, but Marston felt sure Mr. Hope had not been consulted in the matter; so instead of going through the gate by which he had entered, he went round the house to the plantation beyond, and there came upon Mr. Hope, who was much alarmed on seeing a stranger suddenly appear before him.

'I am one of your workmen, Mr. Hope,' began Marston, by way of reassuring the little man; but his words had an entirely opposite effect. Mr. Hope looked wildly to right and left of him, but seeing no chance of escape, resigned himself, with a deep sigh, to dynamite or whatever other shape this particular working-man's arguments might take.

'What do you want?' faltered the employer, at last.

'I want this strike to end.'

'Oh, so do I, so do I,' cried Mr. Hope, almost in tears.

'Then, Mr. Hope, won't you allow me to speak with you for a few moments, and see if we cannot find some way out of the difficulty?'

'Surely, surely,' replied the trembling old man, visibly relieved at finding that his former employé did not intend to use the stout stick, which he carried in his hand, for the purpose of a personal assault. 'Let us walk a little further from the house, where we can talk quietly. Have you anything to propose?'

'Well, the chief trouble seems to be that Mr. Sartwell will not meet Gibbons.'

'Ah, Sartwell!' said the old man, as if whispering to himself. 'Sartwell is a strong man—a strong man; difficult to persuade—difficult to persuade.' Then,

turning suddenly, he asked, 'You're not Gibbons, are you?'

'No, my name is Marston. Gibbons is the man who tried to speak with you yesterday at the gates.'

The old man shuddered at the recollection.

'There were so many there, that I did not see any one distinctly, and it all took place so suddenly. I don't remember Gibbons. It was dreadful—dreadful.'

'I hope you were not hurt.'

'No, no. Merely a scratch or two. Nothing to speak of. Now, what can be done about the strike?'

'Would you be prepared to grant the requests of the men if they were to throw over Gibbons and send a deputation to Mr. Sartwell?'

'Oh, willingly, most willingly. I don't at all remember what it is the men want, but we'll grant it; anything to stop this suicidal struggle. Does Sartwell know you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Of course he does. He knows every one in the works, by name even. A wonderful man—a wonderful man. I often wish I had more influence with him. Now, if you would go and see Mr. Sartwell—he lives at Wimbledon, it's on your way; I asked him not to go to the Works to-day, so, maybe, you will find him at home—you might possibly arrange with him about receiving a deputation. Perhaps it would be best not to tell him that you've seen me—yes, I'm sure it's best not. Then I'll speak to him about granting the men's demands. I'll put my foot down; so will Monkton. We'll be firm with him.'

The old man glanced timidly over his shoulder.

'We'll say to him that we've stood at his back about Gibbons, and now he must settle at once with the men when they've abandoned Gibbons. Why will he not see Gibbons, do you know? Has he a personal dislike to the man?'

'Oh no. It is a matter of principle with Mr. Sartwell. Gibbons is not one of your workmen.'

'Ah, yes, yes. I remember now. That's exactly what Sartwell said. Well, I'm very much obliged to you for coming, and I hope these awful occurrences are at an end. Good-bye. There's a train in half an hour which stops at Wimbledon.'

'Thank you, Mr. Hope, but I'm on foot to-day.'

'Bless me, it's a long distance and roundabout by road. The train will get you there in a few minutes.'

Marston laughed.

'I don't mind walking,' he said.

The old man looked at him for a few moments.

'You don't mean to tell me you have walked all the way from London this morning?'

'It's only twelve or thirteen miles.'

'Dear, dear! dear, dear! I see, I see. Yes, Sartwell's right. I'm not a very brilliant man, although I think one's manager should not say so before one's partner. Come with me to the house for a moment.'

'I think I should be off now.'

'No, no, come with me. I won't keep you long; I won't take a refusal. I am going to put my foot down, as I said. I have had too little self-assertion in the past. Come along.'

Mr. Hope led the way courageously towards his dwelling, keeping the trees as a screen between himself and the house as much as possible and as long as he could. He shuffled hastily across the open space and walked gingerly up the steps at the back of the building, letting himself into a wide hall, and then noiselessly entered a square room which gave outlook upon the broad lawn and plantation at the rear. The room was lined with books; a solid oak table stood in the centre, flanked by comfortable arm-chairs. Mr. Hope rang the bell, and held the door slightly ajar.

'Is there any cold meat downstairs, Susy?' he whispered to the unseen person through the opening.

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, bring up enough for two; some pickles, bread and butter, and a bit of cheese.' Then turning to Marston, he asked,—

'Will you drink wine or beer?'

'Really, Mr. Hope,' said the young man, moistening his lips and speaking with difficulty, 'I'm not in the least hungry.'

Which was not true, for the very recital of the articles of food made him feel so faint that he had to lean against the bookcase for support.

'Bring a bottle of beer, please,' said the host, softly closing the door.

'Sit down, sit down,' he said to Marston. 'Not hungry? Of course you're hungry, after such a walk, no matter how hearty a breakfast you took before you left.'

While Marston ate, Mr. Hope said nothing, but sat intently listening with apparent anxiety. Once he arose and cautiously turned the key in the door, and seemed to breathe more easily when this was done.

'Now,' said the old man, when Marston had finished his meal, 'you must go by rail to Wimbledon. Time is of importance—time is of importance. Here is a little money for expenses.'

'I cannot take the money from you, Mr. Hope, but thank you all the same.'

'Nonsense—nonsense. You are acting for me, you know.'

'No, sir, I am acting for the men.'

'Well, it's the same thing. Benefit one, benefit all. Come, come, I insist. I put down my foot; call it wages if you like. No doubt you didn't want to strike.'

'I didn't want to; but I struck.'

'Same thing—same thing. You must take the money.'

'I'd much rather not, sir.'

Marston saw the anxiety of his host, who acted as a man might over whose head some disaster impended; and it weakened the resolution which he had formed not to take the money. He understood that for some reason Mr. Hope wanted him to take it, and be gone.

'Tut, tut,' persisted the old man, eagerly. 'We mustn't let trifles stand in the way of success.'

As he was speaking an imperious voice sounded in the hall—the voice of a woman. A sudden pallor overspread Mr. Hope's face, which reminded Marston of the look it had worn when the twelve policemen escorted him and his partner through the crowd.

'Here, here,' said the old man, in a husky whisper 'take the money and say nothing about it—nothing about it.'

Marston took the money and slipped it into his pocket. The voice in the hall rang out again.

'Where is Mr. Hope, Susan?' it asked.

'He was in the back walk a few minutes ago, mum.'

Firm footsteps passed down the hall, the outside door opened and shut, and, in the silence, the crunch of feet on the gravel was distinctly heard.

The anxiety cleared away from Mr. Hope's face like the passing of a cloud, and a faint smile hovered about his lips. He seemed to have forgotten Marston's presence in the tension of the moment.

'Clever girl, Susy! So I was—so I was,' he murmured to himself.

'Good-bye, and thank you, Mr. Hope,' said Marston, rising. 'I will go at once and see Mr. Sartwell.'

'Yes, yes. In a moment—in a moment,' said the old man, with a glance out of the window. His voice

sank into an apologetic tone as he added, as if asking a favour: 'Won't you take some money with you to be given anonymously—anonymously, mind—to the committee for the men? You see, the negotiations may take a few days, and I understand they are badly off—badly off.'

Even Marston smiled at the suggestion.

'I don't see how that could be managed. I shall have to tell the men that I have been to see you, or at least some of them; and they might misunderstand. I think, perhaps——'

'I see—I see. There is a difficulty, of course. I shall send it in the usual way to the papers. That's the best plan.'

'To the papers?' said Marston, astonished.

The old man looked at him in alarm.

'I didn't intend to mention that. As you say, it might be misunderstood—misunderstood. The world seems to be made up of misunderstandings. But you'll not say anything about it, will you? I did it in a roundabout way, so as not to cause any ill-feeling, under the name of "Well-wisher." Merely trifles, you know, trifles, now and then. Sartwell said the strike would end in a fortnight or three weeks. He's a clever man, Sartwell, a very clever man; but he was mistaken in that. We all make mistakes at one time or another. You see, I shouldn't care for him to know that I contributed anonymously to the strike fund; he might think it prolonged the strike, and perhaps it did—perhaps it did. It is difficult to say what one's duty is in a case like this—very difficult. So perhaps it is best to mention this to no one.'

'I shall never breathe a word about it, Mr. Hope.'

'That's right—that's right. I am very glad you came, and I'll speak to Sartwell about you when we get into running order again. Now, just come out by the front door this time, and when you speak to Mr. Sartwell be careful not to say anything that

might appear to criticize his actions in any way. Don't cross him—don't cross him. The easiest way is generally the best. If any one has to put a foot down, leave that to me—leave that to me.'

The manufacturer himself let his employé out by the front entrance, and the young man walked briskly to Surbiton Station.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN young Marston reached the walled-in house at Wimbledon, he found that Sartwell had indeed paid little attention to the wishes of his chief, and had left for the Works at his usual hour in the morning. Mr. Hope had evidently not put his foot down firmly enough when he told the manager not to go to his office.

Marston stood hesitatingly on the doorstep, not knowing exactly the next best thing to do. After the events of yesterday, there was some difficulty about seeking an interview with the manager at his office.

'Mrs. Sartwell's not at home either,' said the servant, noting his indecision; 'but Miss Sartwell is in the garden. Perhaps you would like to see her?'

Perhaps! The young man's pulses beat faster at the mere mention of her name. He tried to convince himself that he was lingering there through disappointment at finding the manager away from home; but he knew that all his faculties were alert to catch sight or sound of her to whom his heart was given. He hoped to hear her voice; to get a glimpse of her, however fleeting. He wanted nothing on earth so much at that moment as to speak with her, to touch her hand; but he knew that if he met her, and if the meeting came to her father's knowledge, it would kindle Sartwell's fierce resentment against him, and

undoubtedly jeopardize his mission. Sartwell would see in his visit to Wimbledon nothing but a ruse to obtain an interview with the girl. Braunt had trusted him, and had sent him off with a hearty 'God-speed'; the fate of exasperated men on the very brink of disorder might depend on his success. Women and children might have to starve as a consequence of his having five minutes' delightful talk with Edna Sartwell. No such temptation had ever confronted him before, and he put it away from him with a faint and wavering mind.

'No,' he said, with a sigh; 'it was Mr. Sartwell I wanted to see. I will call upon him at his office.'

The servant closed the door with a bang. Surely he did not need to take all that time, keeping her standing there, to say 'No.' The smallness of a word, however, bears little relation to the difficulty which there may be in pronouncing it. Yet the bang of the door, resulting from his hesitation, brought about the meeting he had, with such reluctance, resolved to forgo. It is perhaps hardly complimentary to Sartwell to state that when his daughter heard the door shut so emphatically, she thought that her father had returned and that something had gone wrong. Patience was not among Sartwell's virtues; and when his wife, actuated solely by a strict sense of duty, endeavoured to point out to him some of his numerous failings, the man, instead of being grateful, often terminated a conversation, intended entirely for his own good, by violently slamming the door, and betaking himself to the breezy common, where an irritable man may walk miles without going twice over the same path.

The girl ran towards the front of the house on hearing the noisy closing of the door, and was far from being reassured when she recognized Marston almost at the gate. That something had happened to her father instantly flashed across her mind. She

fleetly overtook the young man, and his evident agitation on seeing her confirmed her fears.

'Oh, Mr. Marston,' she cried, breathlessly, 'is there anything wrong? Has there been more trouble at the Works?'

'No—I don't think so,' he stammered.

'I feel sure something is amiss. Tell me, tell me! Don't keep me in suspense.'

'I think everything is all right.'

'Why do you say you think? Aren't you sure? You have come from the Works?'

'No, I haven't. I've just come from Surbiton. I wanted to speak with Mr. Sartwell, but I find he's not at home.'

'Oh,' said the girl, evidently much relieved. Then she flashed a bewilderingly piercing glance at him, that vaguely recalled her father to his mind.

'From Surbiton? You came from Surbiton just now?'

'Yes,' he faltered.

'You have been to see Mr. Hope?'

Marston was undoubtedly confused, and the girl saw it. A flush of anger overspread her face.

'If your visit was a secret one, of course I don't expect you to answer my question.'

'It was not intended to be a secret visit, but—but Mr. Hope asked me not to mention it.'

'Not to mention it to my father?'

'To any one.'

Edna Sartwell gazed at the unhappy young man with a look of reproach in her eyes, and also, alas! a suggestion of scorn.

'I can see by your face,' she said, indignantly, 'that you don't want my father to know you have been talking to Mr. Hope about the strike.'

'My face does not tell you everything that is in my mind, Miss Sartwell,' replied Marston, with a burst of courage which astonished himself. 'I saw Mr. Hope

about the strike, and it was his wish, not mine, that Mr. Sartwell should not know I had been there. But I am wrong in saying the wish was not mine. I don't want Mr. Sartwell to know either.'

'Well, I call that treachery!' cried the girl, her face ablaze.

'To whom?' asked Marston, the colour leaving his face as it mounted in hers.

'To my father.'

'It may be treachery, as you say, but not to Mr. Sartwell. It is treachery to Gibbons, perhaps, for he is secretary to the Union and leader of the strike, while I am a member of the Union and a striker. I cannot be treacherous to Mr. Sartwell, for we are at war with each other.'

'You were not at war with him when you thought he could do you a favour,' said the girl, disdainfully.

The young man looked at her in speechless amazement.

'Oh yes,' she continued, 'he told me of it—that night I was last at the office. He refused you, and you were angry then. I thought at the time you were merely disappointed, and I spoke to him on your behalf; but he said I knew nothing about you, and I see I didn't. I never thought you were a person who would plot behind your employer's back.'

'Miss Sartwell,' said Marston, speaking slowly, 'you are entirely wrong in your opinion of me. I feel no resentment against Mr. Sartwell, and I hope he has none against me. You spoke of treachery just now; my treachery, as I have said, is against Gibbons. I mean to depose him if I can get enough of the men to vote with me. Then the way will be smooth for Mr. Sartwell to put an end to this trouble, which I am sure is causing him more worry than, perhaps, any one else.'

'But why, if that is the case, don't you want him to know?'

'Don't you see why? It is so that he won't make the same mistake which you have made. You have allowed me to explain; Mr. Sartwell might not have waited for explanations.'

'I have not been very kind, have I?' said Edna, contritely, holding out her hand to him. 'Please forgive me. Now I want to understand all about this, so come with me into the garden, where we shan't be interrupted. Standing here at the gate, some one might call, and then I should have to go into the house, for my mother has gone to Surbiton to see how Mr. Hope is. Was he injured yesterday?'

'No. I will go with you, Miss Sartwell, on one condition.'

'What is that?' asked the girl, in some surprise. She had turned to go, expecting him to follow

'That you will not tell Mr. Sartwell you have been talking with me.'

'Oh, I cannot promise that. I tell my father everything.'

'Very well. That is quite right, of course, but in this instance, when you tell him you talked with me, say that I came to see him; that the servant said neither he nor Mrs. Sartwell was in, and then asked me if I would see you. Tell your father I said 'No,' and that I was leaving when you spoke to me.'

The girl looked frankly at him, a little perplexed wrinkle on her smooth brow. She was puzzled.

'What you say shows you do not understand him. He wouldn't mind in the least your talking to me about the strike, because I am entirely in his confidence; but he might not like it if he knew you had been to see Mr. Hope.'

'Exactly. Now, don't you see that if you tell him you have been talking with me, you will have to tell him what was said? He will learn indirectly that I have been to Surbiton, and will, undoubtedly, be angry; the more so when he hears I did not intend

to tell him. In fact, now that this conversation has taken place, I shall go straight to him and tell him I have talked with Mr. Hope, although I feel sure my doing so will nullify all my plans.'

'And this simply because I talked with you for a few minutes?'

'Yes.'

'I am sorry I stopped you,' she said. 'Perhaps you don't know what it is to think more of one person than of all the rest in the world together. My father is everything to me, and when I saw you I was afraid something had happened to him. It doesn't seem right that I should keep anything from him, and it doesn't seem right that I should put anything in the way of a quick settlement. I don't know what to do.'

When did a woman ever waver without the man in the case taking instant advantage of her indecision; turning her own weapons against her?

'Don't you see,' pleaded Marston, eagerly, 'that Mr. Sartwell has already as much on his mind as a man should bear? Why then add to his anxiety by telling him that I have been here or at Surbiton? The explanations which seem satisfactory to you might not be satisfactory to him. He would then merely worry himself quite unnecessarily——'

'Do you think he would?'

'Think! I know it.'

'Yes, I believe that is true. Well, then, I promise not to tell him of your visit unless he asks me directly. Now come with me; I want to know all your plans, and what Mr. Hope said. I can perhaps help you with a suggestion here and there, for I certainly know what my father will do, and what he won't do, better than any of you.

'Now, although I have promised,' continued Edna, 'I am sure you are wrong in thinking my father would be displeased if he knew we talked over the strike together; and, if I have said I will not tell him you

were here, it is not because I fear he will be annoyed at that, but because I would have certainly to tell him of your Surbiton visit as well, and, as you say, he might not think you were justified in going to Mr. Hope, no matter what your intentions were. But with me it is quite different. He would just laugh at our discussing the situation, as he does over the conversations I have with Mr. Barnard Hope in this very garden.'

'Ah, Mr. Barnard Hope comes here, does he?'

'Yes, quite often; ever since the strike began. He takes the greatest possible interest in the condition of the working-man.'

'Does he? It is very much to his credit.'

'That's what I say, but father just laughs at him. He thinks that Mr. Hope is a good deal of a—a——'

'Of a fool,' promptly suggested Marston, seeing her hesitation.

'Well, yes,' said Edna, laughing confidentially, 'although that is putting it a little strongly, and is not quite what I intended to say. But I don't think Mr. Barnard Hope is a fool. He may be frivolous—or, rather, he may have been frivolous, but that was before he came to recognize his responsibilities. I think him a very earnest young man, and he is exceedingly humble about it, saying that he hopes his earnestness will make up for any lack of ability which——'

'Then he needs all the earnestness he can bring to bear upon the subject.'

'Oh, he realizes that!' cried Edna, enthusiastically. 'If there is only some one to point to him the way, he says, he will do everything which lies in his power to assist the working-man in bettering his condition. I have told him that his own vacillation of mind is his worst enemy.'

'He vacillates, does he?'

'Dreadfully. He will leave here to-day, for instance, thoroughly convinced that an agreed course of action

is right. To-morrow he will return, having thought it over, and he has ever so many objections that he is not clear about. He says, what is quite true, that it is a most intricate question, which one must look at in all its bearings, otherwise mistakes are certain to be made.'

'That is why he does nothing, I suppose. Then he is sure of not making any mistake.'

Something of bitterness in the young man's tone caused the girl to look at him in surprise. Surely two people who had the interests of the working-man so much at heart as both Hope and Marston, ought to be glad of any help one could give to the other. Yet Marston did not seem to relish hearing of the unselfish and lofty aims of Barney.

'Why do you say he does nothing?'

'Well, when I called upon him before the strike began, hoping he would use his influence to avert trouble, he showed no desire to ameliorate any one's condition but his own. He was comfortable and happy, so why trouble about the men? "Foolish beggars" he called them, when I told him they had voted to go on strike.'

'Now you see,' cried Edna, gleefully, 'how easy it is, as you yourself said, for men to misunderstand each other. A few words of explanation will show you that you have thought unjustly of Mr. Barnard Hope. He did intend to use his influence on behalf of the men, and came all the way from Chelsea here to see my father on the subject, just as you have done to-day; and my father was not at home, just as it has happened to-day. Mr. Hope talked it over with mother and me, and he quite agreed with us that it would not be fair to my father if there were any interference. It was for my father's sake that he refused to take part in the dispute.'

To this conclusive defence of Barney the young man had no answer; but he was saved the necessity

of a reply, for both talker and listener were startled by a shrill voice, near the house, calling the girl by name.

Edna started to her feet in alarm, and Marston also arose.

'That is my step-mother calling me. She has returned. I had no idea it was so late. What shall we do? She mustn't see you here, and yet you can't get out without passing the windows.'

'I can go over the wall. I wonder who lives in the next house?'

'It is vacant, but the wall is high and there is broken glass on the top.'

'I'll have a try for it, any way.'

They passed through the shrubbery towards the dividing wall.

'Oh, I am sure you can't do it, and you will cut your hands.'

Marston pulled off his coat, threw it, wide spread, over the barbarous broken glass, stepped back as far as the shrubbery would allow, and took a running jump, catching the top of the wall with his hands where the coat covered the glass. Next instant he was up, putting on his coat while his boots crunched the broken bottles.

'You haven't cut yourself? I'm so glad. Good-bye,' she whispered up to him, her face aglow with excitement.

'One moment,' he said, in a low but distinct voice. 'I haven't had a chance to tell you my plans.'

'Oh, please, please jump down; my mother may be here at any moment.'

The cry of 'Edna!' came again from the house.

'It's all right yet,' whispered Marston. 'But I must know what you think of my plans. I'll be here at this hour to-morrow, and if you are able to meet me, will you throw your shawl, or a ribbon, or anything, on the wall where my coat was, so that I can see it from this side?'

'Do go. If you are seen, it will spoil everything. I don't know what to say about to-morrow. I'll think over it.'

'Remember, I shall be on this side. You make everything so clear that I must consult you about this; it is very important.'

'Yes, yes. I promise, but you are risking it all by remaining there.'

Marston jumped down into another man's garden, and pushed his trespass ruthlessly over and through whatever came in his way until he reached the gate and was out once more on the public road. The safety signal, 'To be let,' was in the windows of the house, and on a board above the high wall.

'Ah, Mr. Barnard Hope,' he muttered, clenching his fist, 'all the good things of this world are not for you. Once over the wall is worth a dozen times through the gate. I fancy I need instruction on my duty to my employers quite as much as you require to have your obligations to the working-man explained to you.'

CHAPTER XVI

'EDNA, where are you?'

'Here, mother.'

'You heard me calling you; why did you not answer?'

'I have answered by coming to you. How is Mr. Hope?'

'In a dreadfully nervous state. He thinks he is not hurt, but I am sure he has been injured internally, which is far worse than outward wounds, as I told him. He seems to be strung on wires, and jumps every time his wife makes the most casual remark to him. I advised him to see a physician and know the worst at once. And Mrs. Hope tells me he acts very queerly. He took scarcely any breakfast this morning, yet, before lunch, he ordered into the study a meal that was simply enormous, and devoured it all alone.'

'Perhaps that was because he had taken so little breakfast.'

'No, child, you don't know what you are talking about. There are some things Mr. Hope can never touch without being ill afterwards. Mrs. Hope is very careful of his diet. There's pickles, for instance; he hasn't touched pickles for sixteen years, yet to-day he consumed a great quantity, and drank a whole bottle of beer, besides eating roast beef and cheese, and ever so many other things. Mrs. Hope, poor

woman, is sitting with folded hands waiting for him to die. I never saw such a look of heavenly resignation on any human face before.'

'As on Mr. Hope's?'

'Edna, don't be pert. You know very well I mean Mrs. Hope's.'

'Really, mother, I didn't. I thought perhaps Mr. Hope was resigned. What does he say?'

'He says it hasn't hurt him in the least, but Mrs. Hope merely sighs and shakes her head. She knows what is in store for him.'

'Perhaps, mother, the poor man was only hungry, and tired of too much dieting. I hope he enjoyed his meal.'

'Edna, you have too little experience, and, much as I regret to say it, too little sense to understand what it means. Mr. Hope's digestive organs have always been weak; always. If it had not been for his wife's anxious care, he would have been dead long ago. She allowed him out of her sight for a few minutes this morning and refused all callers, except myself and one or two of her own very dearest friends, and you see what happened. She fears that the excitement of yesterday has completely ruined his nerves, and that he doesn't know what he is doing, although he insists that he feels as well as ever he did; but I said to Mrs. Hope, I would have the best medical advice at once if I were in her place. Who was it called here to see your father while I was away?'

'I have not been in the house since you left.'

'What? In the garden all this time? Edna, when will you learn to have some responsibility? How can you expect the maids to do their duty if you neglect yours and never look after them?'

'You train them so well, mother, that I did not think it was necessary for me to look after them while you were away.'

'Yes, I train them, and I hope I do my duty towards them; but you also have duties to perform, although you think so lightly of them. You forget that for every hour idled away you will have to give an account on the last Great Day.'

'I have not been idling, and, even if I had, one can't be always thinking of the last Great Day.'

They had by this time reached the drawing-room, and Mrs. Sartwell sat down, gazing with chastened severity at her step-daughter.

'Edna,' she said, solemnly, 'I implore you not to give way to flippancy. That is exactly the way your father talks; and while, let us hope, it will be forgiven him, it ill becomes one of your years to take such a tone. Your father little thinks what trouble he is storing for himself in his training of you; and, if I told him you were deceiving him, he would not believe it. But, some day, alas! his eyes will be opened.'

'How am I deceiving him?' cried Edna, a quick pallor coming into her face.

Her step-mother mournfully shook her head and sighed.

'If your own heart does not tell you, then perhaps I should be silent. You have his wicked temper, my poor child. Your face is pale with anger just because I have mildly tried to show you the right path.'

'You have not shown me the right path. You have said that I am deceiving my father, and I ask what you mean.'

Mrs. Sartwell smiled gently, if sadly.

'How like! how like! I can almost fancy it is your father speaking with your voice.'

'Well, I am glad of that. You don't often say complimentary things to me.'

'That is more of your pertness. You know very well I don't compliment you when I say you are like your father. Far from it. But a day will come when even his eyes shall be opened. Yes, indeed.'

'You mean that his eyes will be opened to my deceit, but you have not told me how I am deceiving him.'

'You deceive him because you take very good care, when in his presence, not to show him the worst side of your character. Oh dear, no! You take good care of that! Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth when he is here. But he'll find you out some day, to his sorrow. Wait till your stubborn wills cross, and then you will each know the other. Of course, now it is all smooth and pleasant; but that is because you don't demand to know what he means, and do not tell him that you can't be bothered about the last Great Day.'

'Father never threatens me with the judgement as you so often do, nor does he make accusations against me, and so I don't need to ask what he means. I suppose I am wicked,' continued the girl, almost in tears; 'but you say things that seem always to bring out the bad side of my character.'

'You are too impulsive,' said the lady, smoothly. 'You are first impenitently impudent to me; and then you say that you have a bad character, which I never asserted. You are not worse than your father.'

'Worse? I only wish I were half as good.'

'Ah, that's because you don't know him any better than he knows you. You think he takes you entirely into his confidence, but he does nothing of the sort. Why did he so carefully carry away the newspaper with him this morning?'

'I'm sure I don't know. Why shouldn't he? It's his own.'

'His own, yes, but he never did it before. He took it away the better to deceive his wife and daughter, that's why. So that we shouldn't know how he braved and defied the men yesterday. Oh, I can see him! It was just the kind of thing that would gratify his worldly pride.'

'Oh, what happened, mother?' cried the girl, breathless with anxiety.

'I thought he didn't tell you, and I suppose he did not mention that poor Mr. Hope and Mr. Monkton, too, begged and implored him not to go to the Works to-day—yes, almost on their bended knees, and he paid not the slightest attention to their wishes—and they his employers! If for no other reason, he——'

'But tell me what he did. How did he defy the men?'

'Why do you not allow me to finish what I am saying? Why are you so impatient?'

'Because he is my father. Is that not reason enough?'

'Yes, my poor child, yes,' murmured Mrs. Sartwell, in mournful cadence; 'that is reason enough. Like father, like daughter. It is perhaps too much for me to expect patience from you, when he has so little.'

'That is not my meaning; but never mind. Please tell me if he was in danger.'

'We are all of us in danger every moment of our lives, and are saved from it by merciful interposition, and not by any virtue of our own puny efforts. How often, how often have I made my poor endeavour to impress this great truth on your father's mind, only to be met with scorn and scoffing, as if scorn and scoffing would avail on the last—— Why are you acting so, Edna? You pace up and down the room in a way that is, I regret to say it, most unladylike. You shouldn't spring from your chair in that abrupt manner. I say that scoffing will not avail. Surely I have a right to make the statement in my own house! When I said to your father this very morning that he should not boast in his own strength, which is but fleeting, but should put his trust in a Higher Power, he answered that he did—the police were on

the ground. What is that but scoffing? He knew I was not referring to the police.'

Edna had left the room before her step-mother completed the last sentence, and when the much-tried woman, arising, with a weary sigh, followed the girl into the hall, she found herself confronted with another domestic tribulation. Edna had her hat on and was fastening her cloak.

'Where are you going?' asked her amazed step-mother.

'To London.'

'To London! Does your father know of this?'

'He will. I am going to take a hansom from the station to the Works.'

'What! Drive through that howling mob?'

'The howling mob won't hurt me.'

'Child, you are crazy! What is the meaning of this?'

'The meaning is that I am going to hear what danger my father was in yesterday, and to be with him if he is in danger to-day.'

The good woman held up her hands in helpless dismay. 'Was ever human being, anxious to do her duty to all, harassed by two such ungovernable persons since the world began?' she said to herself. But for once she made exactly the remark to cope with the situation.

'The time has come sooner than I expected. Your father has forbidden you to go to the office; and when he sees that you have disobeyed him at such a time as this, he will be furious. Then you will know what I have to stand.'

The impetuous girl paused in her preparations.

'Then why do you exasperate me beyond endurance by refusing to tell me what happened?'

'I refuse! I refuse you nothing; better would it have been for me if I had, when you were younger; then you would think twice before you fling all

obedience to the winds. You have only to ask what you want to know, and listen with patience while it is told to you.'

'I have asked you a dozen times.'

'How you do exaggerate! I call it exaggeration, although I might perhaps be forgiven for using a harsher term. Exactitude of statement is more——'

'Will you tell me, or shall I go?'

'Have I not just said that I will tell you anything? What is it you want to know? Your own ridiculous conduct has driven everything out of my head.'

'You said that my father had defied the men and was in danger yesterday.'

'Oh, that! After seeing the police guard Mr. Hope and Mr. Monkton through the lawless mob, what must your father do but show how brave he is compared with his superiors! He came out of the gates alone and walked through the mob.'

'What did he say?'

'He didn't say anything.'

'Then how did he defy the men?'

'Good gracious, child, how stupid you are! When men are driven to extremities, surely his coming out among them—and he the cause of it all—was defiance enough. But a full account is in the paper I bought at the station; it is on the hall-table, where you would have seen it if you could have kept your temper. Read it if you wish to. It is not me you are disobeying when you do so. Remember, it was your father who did not want you to see the paper.'

The day proved a long one to Edna Sartwell; and, when her father did not return at the usual hour, she became more and more anxious. Her step-mother said nothing about the delay, as the hours passed, but began to assume that air of patient resignation which became her so well. Dinner was served to the minute, and at the accustomed moment the table was cleared. Once or twice she chided Edna for her restlessness,

and regretted that she had to speak, but was compelled to do so, because the good example she herself set was so palpably unappreciated. At last she said—

'Edna, go to bed. I will wait up for your father.'

'He is sure to be home soon; please let me wait until he comes.'

There was silence for a few minutes.

'I don't wish to ask you twice, Edna. You heard what I said.'

'Please do not send me away until father comes. I am so anxious. Let me sit up instead of you. I can't sleep if I do go to bed. Won't you let me sit up in your place?'

The martyred look came into the thin face of her step-mother—the look which told of trials uncomplainingly borne.

'I have always sat up for your father, and always shall, so long as we are spared to each other. For the third time, I ask you to go to bed.'

The girl sat where she was, the red flag of rebellion in her cheek. The glint of suppressed anger in Mrs. Sartwell's eye showed that a point had been reached where one or other of them had to leave the room defeated. The elder woman exhibited her forbearance by speaking in the same level tone throughout.

'Do you intend to obey me, Edna?'

'No, I do not.'

Mrs. Sartwell went on with her sewing—a little straighter in the back perhaps, but not otherwise visibly disturbed by the unjustifiable conduct of the girl. In each instance after Edna's prompt replies there was silence for a few moments.

'In the earlier part of the day, Edna, you permitted yourself to speak to me and act towards me in a manner which I hoped you would regret when opportunity for reflection was given. I expected some

expression of contrition from you. Have you reflected, Edna?'

'Yes.'

Mrs. Sartwell threaded her needle with almost excessive deliberation.

'And what has been the result?'

'That I was pleased to think I had said nothing harsher than I did.'

The ticking of the tall clock on the landing echoed throughout the house. Edna listened intently for a quick, firm step on the gravel, but the silence outside was complete.

'Added to your—if I use the word insolence, it is because I can think of no other term with which to characterize the remarks you have addressed to me;—added to your insolence is now disobedience. If I am overstating the case, no one can be more pleased than I, to be corrected—in the proper spirit.'

'I have no desire to correct you.'

After nipping the thread with her teeth, and drawing a deep sigh, Mrs. Sartwell said—

'In every household, Edna, some one must command and others obey. When my time comes, I shall gladly lay down the burden of what poor authority is delegated to me; but until that time comes, I shall be mistress in my own house. Your father freely, and of his own choice, gave me that authority, and he, not you, is the proper person to revoke it, if it pleases him to do so. I shall therefore say nothing more until he returns. Then he must choose between us. If you are to be mistress here, I shall bow my head without a word and leave this house, praying that peace and every blessing may remain within it.'

Something of the self-sacrificing resignation breathing through these measured words must have touched the hardened heart of the girl, for she buried her face in her hands and began to weep; a certain sign of defeat. But she evidently determined not to give her

antagonist the satisfaction fairly won by so admirable a dissertation upon the correct conduct of a well-ordered household.

'It is always poor father,' she sobbed. 'With all the trouble and anxiety already on his mind, he must be worried when he comes home by our miserable squabbles.'

'I never squabble, Edna. Neither do I use such an undignified word. Where you got it, I'm sure I do not know, but it was not from me. If you wish your father not to be troubled, then you should act so that it would not be necessary to appeal to him. It is no wish of mine to add to his cares—far otherwise. Are you ready to obey me now?'

'Yes.'

The girl rose and went rather uncertainly to the door, her eyes filled with tears.

'You have not kissed me good-night, Edna.'

She kissed her step-mother on the cheek and went to her room, flinging herself, dressed as she was, on her bed, sobbing. Yet she listened for that step on the gravel which did not come. At last she rose, did her hair for the night, and bathed her face so that her father, if he came home and saw her, should not know she had been crying. Wrapping herself in her dressing-gown, she sat by the window and listened intently and anxiously. It was after midnight when the last train came in, and some minutes later her alert ear caught the sound of the long-expected step far down the street, but it was not the quick, nervous tread to which she was accustomed. It was the step of a tired man. She thought of softly calling to him from the window, but did not. Holding her door ajar, she heard the murmur of her step-mother's voice, and occasionally the shorter, gruffer note of her father's monosyllabic replies. After what seemed an interminable time, her step-mother came up alone and the door of her room closed.

Edna, holding her breath, slipped noiselessly out of her room and down the stairs. The steps were kind to her and did not creak. She opened the door of the dining-room, and appeared as silently as if she were a ghost. Her father started from his chair, and it required all his habitual self-command to repress the exclamation that rose to his lips.

'Heaven help us, my dearest girl! Do you want to frighten your father out of what little wits he has left him?' he whispered. 'Why aren't you asleep?'

She gently closed the door, then ran to him and threw her arms about his neck.

'Oh, father, are you safe? You are not hurt?'

'Hurt? Why, what should hurt me, you silly baby?' He ruffled her hair, pulling it over her eyes. 'You've been dreaming; I believe you are talking in your sleep now. Why are you not in bed?'

'I couldn't sleep till you came home. What kept you so late, father?'

'Now, this is more than the law requires of a man! Have I to make explanations to two women every night when I come home by the late train?'

The girl sat down on a hassock and laid her head on her father's knee, he smoothing her hair caressingly.

'What is all this pother about, Edna? Why are you so anxious at my being out late?'

'I was afraid you were in danger; I read what was said in the paper about your defying the men, and—and——'

Sartwell laughed, quietly.

'My dear girl, if you are going to begin life by believing all you see in the papers, you will have an uneasy time of it. I can tell you something much more startling which has not yet appeared in print.'

'What is that, father?' asked the girl, looking up at him.

'That you have been a most unruly child all day,

causing deep anxiety to those responsible for your up-bringing.'

Edna sank her head again upon her father's knee.

'Yes,' she said, 'that is quite true. I have been dreadfully wicked and rebellious, saying things which I ought not to have said.'

'And leaving unsaid the things——ah, well, few of us are quite perfect. It is a blessing that there is such a thing as forgiveness of sins, otherwise most of us would come badly off.'

'Somehow when you are here, nothing seems to matter, and any worries of the day appear small and trivial, and I wonder why they troubled me; but when you are away——well, it's different altogether.'

'That is very flattering to me, Edna; but you mustn't imagine that I'm to be cajoled into omitting the scolding which you know you deserve. No. I can see through your diplomacy. It won't do, my dear girl, it won't do.'

'It isn't diplomacy or flattery; it's true. I'll take my scolding most meekly if you tell me what happened to-day.'

'I refuse to bargain with a confessed rebel, still, as I must get you off to bed before the morning, I will tell you what happened. An attempt was made to settle the strike to-day. The men had a meeting to-night, and I waited at my club to hear the outcome. I had a man at the meeting who was to bring me the result of the vote as soon as it was taken. A young man—one of the strikers, but the only man of brains among them—saw me this afternoon, and made certain proposals which I accepted. Gibbons was to be renounced, and a deputation of the men was to come to me. We should probably have settled the matter in ten minutes, if it had come off.'

'Then he failed after all his trouble?'

'Who failed?'

'The—the young man you speak of?'

Edna found her *rôle* of deceiver to be a difficult one. She was glad her father could not see her face, and bitterly regretted giving Marston a promise not to tell of his visit.

'Yes, he failed. Of course, there was no time to canvass the men properly, and at the meeting Gibbons, who is a glib talker, won over enough to defeat the efforts of the others. It wasn't much of a victory, but sufficient for the purpose. They had, I understand, a very stormy meeting, and Gibbons won by some dozen votes or thereabouts.'

'And what is to be done now?'

'Oh, we are just where we were. I'll wait a few days more, and if the men do not come back I'll fill their places with a new lot. I don't want to do that except as a last resort, but I won't be played with very much longer. Now, my dear girl, you know all about it; so to bed, to bed, at once, and sleep soundly. This dissipation cannot be allowed, you know.'

He kissed her and patted her affectionately on the shoulder. The girl, with a guilty feeling in her heart, crept upstairs as noiselessly as she had descended.

CHAPTER XVII

ALBERT LANGLY had found a new and absorbing interest in life. This interest was friendship, the pleasures of which the organist had never before experienced during his lonely and studious existence. He became a constant visitor at Braunt's rooms, and began teaching Jessie the rudiments of music, finding her a willing and apt pupil, as well as a very silent one. Her gaunt face and large, sorrowful eyes haunted him wherever he went; and she looked upon him with an awe such as she would have bestowed upon a being from another world; which perhaps he was, for he had certainly little relationship to the eager, money-seeking inhabitants of this planet. Joe Braunt was quite content to sit in his arm-chair and smoke. However small the money is for the housekeeping, a working-man will generally contrive to provide himself with tobacco.

As often as not Braunt was absent when his daughter had her music-lesson, for Mrs. Grundy has little to say about the domestic arrangements of the extreme poor. The entire absence of all world-wisdom in the young man would have made it difficult for any one to explain to him why two people, who loved music, should not be together as often as opportunity offered, had there been any one who took interest enough in him or in her to attempt such an explana-

tion. The girl, who had even more than her father's worship of harmony, was fascinated by the organist's marvellous skill upon the instrument to which he had devoted his life, before her solemn eyes had lured his musical soul into their mystic influence. The two were lovers, without either of them in the least suspecting it.

Once Langly persuaded Braunt and his daughter to go to the empty church with him and hear the grand organ. The workman and the girl sat together in the wilderness of empty pews and listened, entranced, while the sombre rhythm of the 'Dead March' filled the deserted edifice. Langly played one selection after another, for the love of the music and the love of his audience. It was a concert such as the mad King of Bavaria might have hearkened to in lonely state, but which was heard now by a man without a penny in his pocket, and hardly a crust to eat in his squalid rooms. Whether the deft fingers of the Bavarian player soothed for the moment the demon who tortured the king, as the skill of David lulled the disquiet of Saul, who can say? But certainly the enchanted touch of the solitary organist on the ivory keys transported his listeners into a world where hunger was unknown.

The stillness of the great church, untroubled by outside sounds; the reverberation of harmony from the dim, lofty, vaulted roof; the awaking of unexpected echoes lurking in dark corners; added to the solemnity of the music—gave the hearers and performer a sense of being cut adrift from the Babel beyond. The church, for the time being, was an oasis of peace in a vast desert of turmoil.

Never again could Langly persuade Braunt to accompany him to the church. Some memories are too precious to be molested; and he who risks the repetition of an experience of perfect bliss, prepares for himself a possible disillusion.

'Nay, ma lad,' he said, 'we'll let that rest. Some day, mayhap, if Ah'm iver like beginning to forget what Ah've heard, Ah'll go back, but not now. I would go stark music-mad if Ah often heard playin' like yon; in fact, Ah think sometimes Ah'm half daft already.'

But Jessie often accompanied the organist to the quiet church, neither of them thinking of propriety or impropriety; and luckily they were unseen by either the sexton or his wife, who would have raised a to-do in the sacred interests of fitting and proper conduct. Sometimes the girl sat with him in the organ-loft. watching him as he played; but more often she occupied one of the pews, the better to hear the instrument in sufficient remoteness. Jessie had inherited from her father the taciturnity which characterized him; and her natural reticence was augmented by her shyness. There was seldom any conversation between the two in the church; each appeared abundantly satisfied by the fact that the other was there. They might almost have been mute lovers, for any use which spoken language was to them.

Once, on coming down the narrow stair which led from the organ-loft, Langly thought she had gone, so strangely deserted did the church seem. Even in the day-time the gas had to be lighted when service was held; for the windows were of stained glass, and the church was closely surrounded by tall buildings. The atmosphere in that grim quarter was rarely clear, and the interior of the church was always dim. Langly peered, shortsightedly, into the gloom, but could not descry her. A feeling of vague alarm took possession of him; until, hurrying up the aisle, he saw that she was in her place, with her head resting on the hymn-book board of the pew, apparently asleep. He touched her gently on the shoulder, and, when she slowly raised her head, saw that she had been silently weeping.

'What is the matter, dear?' he whispered, bending over her.

'I feel afraid—afraid of something—I don't know what. The church grew black, dark, suddenly, and the music faded away. I thought I was sinking, sinking down, and no one to save me.' She shuddered as she spoke, and rose uncertainly to her feet, tottering slightly on stepping into the aisle. 'It was like a bad dream,' she added, with long-drawn, quivering breath.

He slipped his arm about her waist, supporting her as they walked down the aisle together.

'It's the darkness of the church,' he said, 'and perhaps the sadness of the music. I'll play something more cheerful next time you come. I play too much in the minor key.'

At the door she asked him to stop a moment before going out. She dried her eyes, but ineffectually; for, leaning against the stone wall, she began to cry again, in a despondent, helpless way, which wrung the young man's heart within him.

'Jessie, Jessie,' he faltered, not knowing what to do or say.

'I feel ill and weak,' she said. 'I shall be all right again presently.'

'Come, and we will have tea somewhere. That will cheer you up.'

They went away together, and he took her to a place where tea was to be had. She sat there dejectedly, leaning her head on her hand, while the refreshments were being brought; he opposite her, in melancholy silence. She sipped the tea with visible effort, but shook her head when he offered her the buttered bread.

'I must get home,' she said, at last. 'I can't eat. I shall be better there.'

They walked slowly to Rose Garden Court; and at No. 3 he helped her up the sordid stair, she clinging breathlessly to the shaky railing at every step or two; he thankful there was but one flight to climb. Braunt

sat in his arm-chair, an angry cloud on his brow. He was in his gruffest mood; looking at them, when they entered, with surly displeasure, but saying nothing. It was the evening after Monkton and Hope's men, by a small majority, had resolved to continue the strike. Braunt's pipe was cold; not another scrap of tobacco could he gather, although he had turned out every pocket in hope of finding a crumb or two. Jessie sank into a chair, her white face turning with mute appeal alternately from her father to her friend, evidently fearing that something harsh might be said; for she knew that her father was rough-spoken when ill-pleased.

'Jessie is not well,' said the organist.

Braunt did not answer him, but crossed over to his daughter, and smoothing her hair, said, more gently than she had expected,—

'What's wrong, lassie? Art hungry?'

'No, no,' murmured the girl, eagerly. 'We had tea before we came in. I'm not hungry.'

Langly, slow as he was to comprehend, saw that Braunt at least had been without food, perhaps for long. He had several times offered him money from his own scanty store, but it had always been refused —sometimes in a manner not altogether friendly. The organist went quietly out, leaving father and daughter alone together.

'Would ye like me to get some one to coom in—some woman?' said Braunt, anxiously. 'We don't know our neighbours; but one of the women would coom, if she knew ye were ill.'

The girl shook her head.

'I want none—naught but just to rest a little. It will all pass away soon. I need but rest.'

The father returned to his chair, and they sat silent in the gathering darkness.

Presently the door was pushed open, and Langly entered with parcels in his arms. He placed a loaf

on the table, with the rest of his burdens, and put on the empty hearth the newspaper that held a pennyworth of coals.

Braunt glared at him, speechless for a moment, then cried out, indignantly:—

'Ah'll ha' none o' thy charity, my lad, d——d if Ah will.'

Before Langly could reply, Jessie rose tremblingly to her feet.

'Don't, father, don't,' she wailed; then swaying, as she attempted to walk towards him, fell suddenly, in a heap, on the floor.

Langly sprang forward, but Braunt brushed him roughly aside, and, stooping over his daughter, lifted her slight form in his arms, speaking soothingly and caressingly to her. He carried her to the bed and placed her lovingly upon it.

'Run,' he cried to Langly. 'Run for a doctor. There's one down Light Street. There's something main wrong here, Ah'm feared.'

The young man needed no second telling. The doctor demurred when asked to visit Rose Garden Court; he had his own patients to attend to, he said. He knew there was little to be got out of the Court.

'I am organist at St. Martyrs',' replied the messenger, eagerly. 'I will see you paid.'

'Oh, it's not that,' said the doctor. 'Who generally attends people in the Court? There must be some one.'

'I don't know,' answered Langly, 'and I have no time to find out. The case is urgent. Come!'

So the doctor, grumbling, for this kind of practice was out of his line, went with him.

They found Braunt anxiously chafing the hands of the girl.

'Ye've been long aboot it!' he cried, as they entered. Neither answered, and the doctor went

quickly to the bed, with the seemingly callous indifference of a man to whom such scenes are matters of hourly routine. He placed his thumb upon her wrist, bent his ear down to her breast, then put his hand on her smooth, white brow.

'Has she been long ill?' he asked, sharply.

'Jessie was always weakly,' answered her father, 'and latterly has not been at all well, poor girl.'

'Who has attended her?'

'No one.'

'Oh, well, you know, I can't grant a death certificate under these circumstances. There will most likely be an inquest.'

'Good God!' shrieked Braunt. 'An inquest? Ye don't mean to say—ye can't mean it—Jessie is not dead!'

'Yes; she is dead. I can do no good here. I'll let the coroner know, and he can do as he pleases. I have no doubt it is all right, but we are bound to act according to the law, you know. Good-night.'

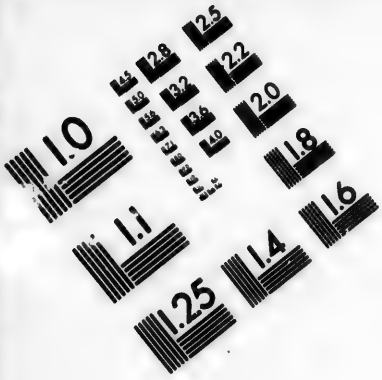
Braunt threw himself upon the bed in a storm of grief: Langly stood by the side of the dead girl, stunned. He took her limp, thin hand in his, and gazed down upon her, dazed and tearless. Her father rose and paced the room, alternately pleading with fate and cursing it. Suddenly he turned on Langly like a madman.

'What art doin' here?' he roared. ''Twas thy interference caused her last words to be troubled. Get you gone and leave us alone.'

Langly turned from the bed and walked slowly to the door without a word, Braunt following him with lowering, blood-shot eyes. The young man paused irresolutely at the door, leaned his arm against it, and bowed his head in hopeless anguish.

'Heaven help me!' he said, despairingly. 'I loved her too.'

Braunt looked at him a moment, not compre-



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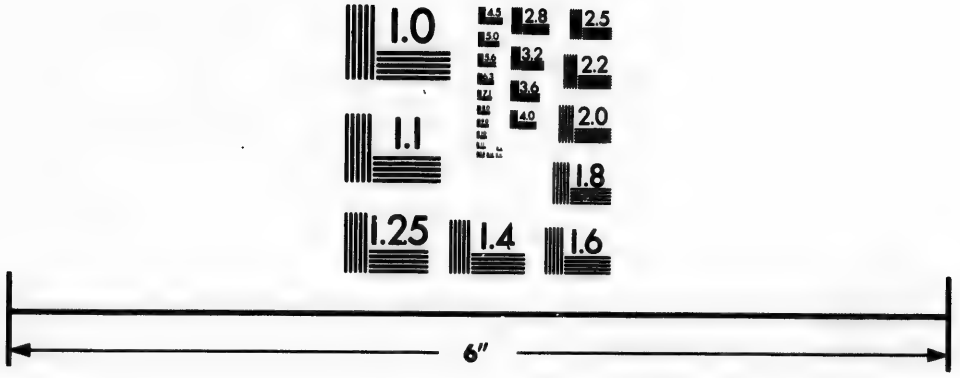

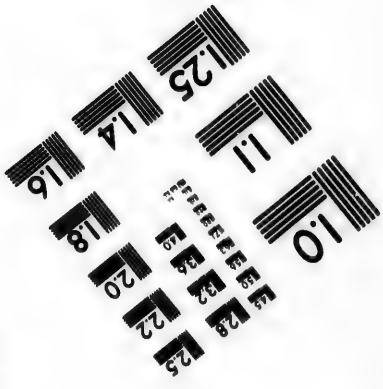

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hending at first. Gradually the anger faded from his face.

'Did thee so, lad?' he said, gently, at last. 'I didn't know—I didn't know. Forgive me ma brutish temper. God knows, it should be broken by this time. Ah'm crazy, lad, and know not what Ah say. Ah've not a penny piece in the world, nor where to go to get aught. Ma lassie shall not have a pauper's funeral in this heartless town, no, not if Ah ha' to take her in ma arms, as Ah ha' oft done, and trudge wi' her to the North, sleeping under the hedges, by the way. Yes, that's what Ah'll do. We'll be tramping to the "Dead March" then. It will keep us company. We'll rest at night in the green fields under the trees, away from the smoke and din, alone togither. Ah, God, Ah'll begin the journey now, and tramp all night to be quit o' this Babylon ere the morning.'

'No, no,' cried Langly, catching his arm, 'you mustn't do that. You must hear what the coroner says.'

'What has the coroner or any one else to do wi' me, or her?'

'It is the law; you must obey it.'

'What care Ah for the law? What's it done for either me or Jessie? Ah'll have no pauper funeral, law or no law.'

'There won't be a pauper funeral. There are kind hearts in London, as well as in the North. Promise me you'll do nothing until I see if I can get the money.'

'Ah promise,' said Braunt, sinking into his chair. 'Ah doubt if Ah could walk far to-night, even if Ah tried. But leave me now, lad, and come back again later. Ah want to be alone and think.'

Langly left the room, and on the landing met Marston, whom he did not know, but who, he saw, was about to enter.

'Don't go in,' he whispered; 'he wants to be alone.'

'Is there anything wrong?' asked Marston, alarmed at the tone of the other.

'Yes, his daughter is dead.'

'Dead! Good God, how? An accident?'

'No. She has been ill for weeks, but no one thought of this. Jessie died about an hour since—unexpectedly. Are you a friend of his?'

'Yes.'

'Then you must tell me—tell me what to do! Come down into the Court, where we can talk.'

The two young men descended the stair.

'Braunt has no money, and he will not have his daughter buried by the parish. We must get money. I have promised it, but I have very little myself, although I will willingly give all I have; if it was more I would not ask help from any one.'

'I have only a few shillings,' said Marston, 'but we must get more somehow. None of the men have any, or they would give it. Yesterday I could have gone to Sartwell, but to-day, unfortunately, I have quarrelled with him, bitterly and irretrievably, I fear. Although he said nothing to me, I can't go to him. But there is Barnard Hope. Yes, he's the man. He helped Braunt when there was trouble with the police. I don't like to go to Barnard Hope—for certain reasons I don't care to be indebted to him—would you mind going? He lives in Chelsea.'

'No. I will do anything I can. I have promised.'

'Then I would go to-night, if I were you. To-morrow is his "At home" day, and there will be a lot of people there. It will be difficult to see him then, and we can't wait until the day after. His address is Craigenputtock House, Chelsea. If you fail, I will see his father, so one or other of us is sure to get the money.'

'I will go at once,' said Langly.

It was a long journey to Chelsea, and when the tired organist reached the place he found that Barney

had gone with some friends to the theatre, that there was a dance to follow, and that he very likely would not be home that night. It was uncertain when he would return in the morning, but he would be sure to be back at three o'clock the next afternoon, as his 'At home' friends would begin to gather at that hour, so Barney's servant said. The wearied man tramped back, and reached Rose Garden Court about midnight. He rapped at Braunt's door, and receiving no answer, pushed it open, after a moment's hesitation. He feared that the headstrong, impatient man might, after all, have carried out his resolution and left with his burden for the North, but he found nothing changed. Braunt sat there with his head in his hands, and gave him no greeting.

'I am to have the money to-morrow,' Langly said, feeling sure that it would not be refused.

Braunt made no answer; and, taking one look at the silent figure on the bed, whose face seemed now like that of a little child, the young man departed as quietly as he had entered.

Mrs. Scimmins met him on the stairs. She wanted to know all about it. She said that the women of the Court, when they heard of the death, had offered their help, but Braunt had acted like a brute, and had driven them away with fearful oaths. She was sure something was wrong. The coroner had been there, and thought so too. There was to be an inquest at the Vestry Hall in the morning. A summons had been left for Langly to attend and give his evidence.

'But I'm going to Chelsea in the morning,' cried the young man, aghast. 'I know nothing except that Jessie has been ill.'

'You saw her die, they say. Braunt admitted that. You will have to attend the inquest, or they will send a policeman after you.'

Langly did not sleep that night, and was gaunt and haggard in the morning. The coroner's jury

trooped up the stair, and after looking at the dead girl, adjourned to the Vestry Hall. Langly gave his evidence, and, leaving the room at once, hovered about the door, waiting for Braunt, who remained in the Vestry Hall. At last he came out with white face, staring straight ahead of him.

'What did they say?' asked Langly; but the other made no answer, striding through the curious crowd as if he saw nothing.

'What was the verdict?' inquired a bystander of one of the jurymen as he came out.

'Starved to death,' replied the man.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON the day after Marston's failure to win a majority of the men to his side in the strike controversy, the young man went to Wimbledon, hoping to find consolation for his defeat in the company of the girl he loved. He felt that he was, perhaps, taking rather an unfair advantage of Sartwell in thus making a clandestine appointment with his daughter, but he justified himself, as lovers always have justified themselves, by holding that a man was a fool to lose a trick when he had the card in his hand with which to take it. It was evident that Sartwell had no objection to the visits of Barnard Hope, and that he would be quite willing to have his daughter marry the son of his employer. If Marston had known this the day before, he would not have been so self-denying, in the first case, in refusing to see Edna Sartwell; and now that fate had interposed in his behalf, giving him the knowledge that he had a rival, he was not going to be idiot enough to throw away his chance.

He entered the vacant plot surrounding the empty house, and looked anxiously along the glass-topped wall for the signal which Edna had, under compulsion, promised to display. It was not in sight. He wondered if, after all, the girl had told her father of his visit. Let Sartwell get but the slightest inkling

of it, and Marston was certain that every particular would soon be within the manager's knowledge.

He wandered up and down the wrong side of the wall disconsolately, not knowing what to do. Once he paused near the spot where he had, on the previous day, jumped over. He imagined he heard a slight cough on the other side. It might mean a warning or an invitation; the question was, which? She must know that he would be there, waiting for her signal; or, perhaps (the thought was bitter), she might have forgotten all about him.

At the further end of the garden was a park fence, lower than the forbidding stone wall, which it joined at right angles. As anything is better than suspense, the young man resolved to take the risk of reconnoitring. He mounted the park fence and peered over the wall, but the trees and shrubbery were so thick that he was unable to see whether any one was in Sartwell's garden or not; even the house was hidden from his view. Faint heart never climbed a stone wall; Marston hesitated but a moment, seized a branch of an over-hanging tree, pulled himself up to the top, taking the risk of being hurt by the glass, and leaped down into the shrubbery on the other side. He listened intently for a while, but there was no sound; then he moved cautiously through the bushes to the open space under the trees where he had talked with her the day before. No one was there, but he caught his breath as he saw a red silk scarf hanging over the back of one of the chairs. She had, at least, thought of him, for that was undoubtedly the unused signal.

He was now in a greater quandary than he had been when on the other side of the wall. She had apparently intended to throw the scarf over the broken glass, otherwise why had she brought it to their rendezvous? but as she had not given the signal agreed upon, might there not be a danger that her

father was at home? The young man knitted his brows as he pondered over what explanation he would give to Sartwell if he were discovered standing under the trees.

Marston had half made up his mind to retrace his steps, when he saw Edna approaching from the house. The girl held out her hand to him with a smile which went to his heart, but her words were not so reassuring.

'I was watching for you,' she said, 'hoping you would not come.'

'Hoping I would not come?' echoed Marston, with a suggestion of dismay in his tone.

'At least, hoping you would not come except by the gate. I don't like this. It seems secret and mean, as if we were doing something we were ashamed of. Now, we may not accomplish much good, talking about the strike, but we are certainly not doing anything either of us should fear to have the whole world know. There is no reason, now that your plans of yesterday have failed, why you should not have come to the front door like any other visitor, is there?'

'I suppose there isn't.'

'Of course there isn't,' cried the girl, eagerly; 'and so I intend to tell my father all about this visit, even if I could not mention yesterday's.'

'Oh, but you must do nothing of the kind,' pleaded Marston, thoroughly alarmed. 'You will promise me, won't you, that you will not say a word of my being here to-day?'

The girl laughed and shook her head.

'I'll make no promise so foolish as yesterday's. You see, my promise did no good.'

'What! Did you tell Mr. Sartwell I had been here?'

'I said I wouldn't, and I didn't; but it made me feel wretchedly guilty, when there was little occasion

for it. What I mean is, that your plans did not succeed in putting an end to the strike, and so it would have made no difference, after all, if I had told my father. Don't you see that? No, I won't make another such promise in a hurry.'

'Miss Sartwell,' said Marston, seriously, 'you don't understand all the circumstances; there are reasons why your father must not know I have been here. Although negotiations have failed for the moment, they will come on again shortly. If Mr. Sartwell knew I was here yesterday——'

'Oh, I intend to keep my promise about yesterday. I shall not say a word about that visit; it is of to-day's I shall tell him.'

'But, don't you see? Yesterday's visit led to this one. They are inseparably joined; you cannot mention one without being led to the other. Please promise you will say nothing about to-day either.'

'I won't make any more promises. When my father came home late last night, he told me all that had happened: what you had tried to do, and everything. I felt so guilty at having to keep anything from him, that I resolved to make no more promises to any one unless he knew of them; and there was no need to feel guilty. I am sure he would have been glad to know we had talked about the strike and were trying to help him; yet, all because of a foolish promise, I did not dare to say a word. I think if you knew what I suffered, you would not ask me to keep anything from him.'

'Dear Miss Sartwell,' cried Marston, with more of his affection for the girl in his voice than he was aware of, 'I would not cause you suffering for anything in the world.'

Edna looked at him with wide-open eyes, surprised at his vehemence; then she laughed merrily.

'Why, how serious you are. After all, I shall soon forget about it; and although I won't make rash

promises again, I'll think it all over, and if—but, then, what is the use of "ifs"? I shall say to my father to-night that you came to see him, and that I talked with you about the strike.'

'Which wouldn't be true, Miss Sartwell. I didn't come to see him, I came to see you.'

'Oh!'

'Yes, and you would have to tell him I climbed over the wall. You can't go in for half-truths, you know; and we haven't talked much about the strike, have we?'

'Ah, but you came for that, didn't you?'

'Yes. Oh yes, of course. Nothing else; but you see it wouldn't do to say anything about this visit to your father unless you told him everything. He would want to know why I came over the wall.'

'And why did you? I am sure you might just as well have come in by the gate. It would have been much easier.'

'I will next time. But you know the wall is there, and I came over it; so without making any promise, I beg of you to say nothing about it to Mr. Sartwell, for he will want all sorts of explanations which I don't quite see that I can give.'

'Well, then, I won't. Oh, dear, that's a promise, isn't it? And I protesting I wouldn't! I suppose you'll think that it is just like a woman. But I'll never make you another promise, never.'

'Oh, don't say that, Miss Sartwell. I would promise you anything.'

'Very well. Promise me you will tell my father you were here.'

The girl laughed as she saw his discomfiture when she so promptly took him at his word.

'There,' she cried, gleefully; 'you see you didn't mean what you said. I really believe you are afraid of my father.'

'I am.'

'How very funny. I should like to tell him that. I can't imagine any one being afraid of him.'

'Perhaps you have never seen him when he is angry.'

'Oh yes, I have; but I just sit quiet and say nothing. He is never violent when angry, as some men are; but his eyes half close and his lips are set tight, and he doesn't care to be spoken to just then: so that's why I don't speak. He was angry with you that night, was he not?'

'What night, Miss Sartwell?' asked Marston, almost holding his breath.

'The night at the office when I came in. The first time you ever spoke to me—don't you remember?'

'I shall never forget it,' Marston said, in a hushed voice.

'Oh, you take things too much to heart, I can see that. You shouldn't mind a little disappointment, nor think my father hard because he refused you. I spoke up for you at the time, as I told you yesterday; and I'm afraid I didn't further your interests by doing so, for father thinks women shouldn't interfere in business.'

They were seated opposite to one another; the girl bending forward in friendly, confidential attitude; the young man unable to take his eyes from her, listening like one in a dream to the entrancing murmur of her speech. 'You spoke up for me?' he repeated, as if soliloquizing.

'Yes; and father said——' The girl paused, embarrassed, remembering that what had been said was not complimentary to her listener.

'What did he say?' asked Marston, breathlessly.

'Well, you know, he thought you too young and inexperienced for a responsible position, and you are not very old, are you? But by-and-by, when you have more experience, I am sure he will listen to you The great thing is to gain his confidence—at least that is what I should try to do.'

'Yes, I should like to win his confidence,' said Marston, dolefully.

'Oh, it's not difficult. All that is required is to do your duty. I think it's nothing against a young man that he is ambitious. Indeed it should be in his favour, especially with a man like my father, because he has always been very ambitious himself; and I think the great drawback with working-men is that they do not seem to care whether they better their positions or not. You can't do anything for a man who won't help himself; and you are ambitious, aren't you?'

'Very. Too much so, I sometimes think.'

'Oh, one cannot be too ambitious, unless one is a man like Napoleon, and thoroughly base and wicked. Then it's wrong, of course. Now, if you want my advice—but perhaps you think I know nothing about these things.'

'Miss Sartwell, I would rather have your advice than any one else's in the world; and I will follow it to the letter.'

'You *do* take things too seriously. What a weight of responsibility you would place upon my shoulders! No; you must hear the advice first, and then judge whether it is best to follow it or not. I think that you should work on quietly for a year or two, doing your very best and saying as little as possible. Father likes a man who does things, rather than one who says things; he doesn't believe much in talk. Then when you see that he trusts you implicitly—perhaps by that time he will offer you the situation. But if he doesn't, please let me know, and I will speak to him about it. Oh, I shall approach the subject very diplomatically. I shall begin by asking how you are getting on at the Works; and if he speaks well of you, I will suggest that you be given a better position than the one you are in. How do you like my plan?'

'It is an admirable one, but—but——'

'But what? Where is the objection to it?'

'There is no objection, except that I may get rather discouraged as time goes on.'

'Oh, what nonsense! You are interested in your work, are you not?'

'Very much so; but if I could see you now and again, I—well—wouldn't become hopeless or despondent, you know. If that could be managed——'

Edna sat back in her chair, and looked straight at him, with clear, wide eyes that seemed puzzled, trying to see beyond what was plainly in view. Marston, burdened by the consciousness that he was not dealing honestly with her, yet afraid to awaken her prematurely to the realities of the situation, was as confused as most single-minded persons are when placed in a false position from which there is no escape without the risk of disaster. For a moment there arose in his fast-beating heart a heroic determination to cast all caution to the winds and cry out, 'I love you, my girl, I love you. I am poor, and your father has forbidden me to see you!' But he feared a repulse from the girl more fatal to his hopes than the check which he had received from her father. He bent his gaze upon the ground and cursed his impatience. He realized that honesty had not been the best policy when he had inopportunely confessed his affection for the girl to her father, although he thought at the time he had taken a manly and straightforward course. Had he been less impulsive, and tried to win still further the confidence of Sartwell, he might perhaps have ultimately gained a footing in his chief's house; and then, who knows what would have happened? He had drawn upon the bank of confidence, and his cheque had been dishonoured; he could not risk a second mistake of that kind.

'I don't like your word "managed,"' said Edna, at last, a little wrinkle of displeasure on her brow.

'Your visits here do not need to be managed. You can come as any other friend of my father comes, and we shall have plenty of opportunities for talk. You persist in thinking that my father has some feeling against you, when I assure you such is not the case.'

Before Marston could answer, the silence was broken by an emphatic click of the gate, and the young man was dumbfounded by seeing Sartwell enter, stride up the path leading to the house, stop, turn his head towards the spot where they sat, then cross the lawn directly to them. Marston sprang to his feet; the girl arose more slowly, a roguish twinkle in her eye. Here was the solution of the problem right to her hand, at precisely the proper moment. The expression of the three faces would have interested a student in physiognomy. Anger, delight, confusion, were reflected from the countenances of Sartwell, Edna, and Marston respectively; but the elder man was the first to control his emotion, and as he approached, his face became an impassive mask, revealing nothing of what was passing through his mind. He cast a brief, sharp glance at Marston, who stood there pale, in the attitude of one who has been captured, and who sees no avenue of escape. A longer, more searching look at his daughter, showed him at once that she had nothing to conceal. Her evident, undisguised pleasure at his coming was too palpable to be misunderstood. He drew a deep breath of relief, but recognized instinctively that the situation required very delicate handling if the girl's ignorance was to be maintained. Here the fates fought on his side; for each man, from directly opposite motives, desired the same thing: neither wished to have a conflict in Edna's presence, neither could run the risk of full knowledge coming to her at that time. Luckily, Edna's eyes were all for her father; and she gave no heed to the young man, whose face and

attitude unmistakably revealed both guilt and discomfiture. She was the first to speak.

'Oh, father, I am so glad you came; we were just speaking of you.'

'Yes, Edna, there are one or two adages bearing on the subject; complimentary and the reverse.'

Edna laughed brightly.

'We have been trying to settle the strike; and Mr. Marston thought you would be angry if you knew he had been here—thought you might call it interference. I told him that was all nonsense; but I could see he was not convinced, so you come at the proper moment to solve the problem finally.'

'I see that I came just in time. I am only too glad to have assistance in unravelling this perplexing tangle of the strike, and I welcome help from any quarter.'

'There!' cried the girl, triumphantly, turning to her lover, who had by this time partially recovered his composure. 'Isn't that just what I said?'

'Mr. Hope told me an hour ago, Marston, that you had visited him yesterday, and had done me the honour to call at Wimbledon afterwards; so I came home fearing I might miss a second visit. Mr. Hope spoke very highly of you, and I do not wish to be less cordial than he, in expressing my own opinion of your most disinterested devotion to the welfare of your fellow-workmen.'

Marston moistened his dry lips, but made no attempt at reply. Timorous little Mr. Hope had not kept faith with him, then; and after counselling him to silence, had blurted out all the particulars as soon as he came again under the influence of his masterful servant, and thus had precipitated this deplorable encounter. Edna looked from one to the other, a slight shade of apprehension on her face. The words of her father were all that she could ask: their tone was unexceptionable, and yet—and yet—there was

frost in the air. She spoke with less buoyancy than before; still, with confidence that all was as it should be.

'That was one of the very points which troubled us. Mr. Hope asked Mr. Marston to say nothing about the Surbiton visit, which I felt sure you wouldn't mind.'

'You did quite right, Marston, in saying nothing about it when Mr. Hope asked you not to mention it; and Edna is right also in stating that it would have made no difference to me.'

'Now,' said Edna to the young man, 'you see how groundless all your fears were, and how a few simple words of explanation clear away all difficulties. I hope you will visit us whenever you want to talk to my father.—You would be pleased to have him come, wouldn't you, father? Mr. Marston has done his best to settle the strike, even though he failed.'

'I quite appreciate that, Marston; and my house is always open to you.'

Edna glanced with a smile at Marston; his eyes were fixed intently on Sartwell, who continued, suavely,—

'However, it is only right that I should let you know there will be no further need to discuss the strike. I have been played with long enough. It is now my turn to strike. On Monday the Works will be going again. I have in my office four times as many applications for work as I have vacancies to fill. My clerks are at this moment writing out some hundreds of telegrams asking the receivers to report for duty on Monday morning. I shall have no more traffic with the Union.'

'Oh!' cried the girl, in dismay.

'Won't you give me another chance with the men?' asked Marston, speaking for the first time. 'There were only a few votes against us at the last meeting.'

'You have from now until Friday night. I give

you all the time there is up to the latest moment, and that is why I pay six times as much, and use the telegraph rather than the post. Letters would do quite as well, posted on Friday. The Works open on Monday, with or without the old hands; so you see that you have little time to lose.'

'I shall go at once to London and call a meeting of the men. May I see you at your office to-morrow?'

'Certainly. My office is always open; but, remember, it is an unconditional surrender now. I'll have no more parleying.'

'Good-bye,' said Marston, briefly, turning on his heel and hurrying to the gate; father and daughter watching him until he disappeared.

Sartwell sank down in one of the chairs, murmuring, as he did so, 'Thank God!'

'Why do you say that, father?'

'Say what? Oh! because a certain tension has been relaxed. I have seen Hope and Monkton off together for Germany this morning, and they will be gone for at least a fortnight. This leaves me a clear field, and I will crush this strike as I would an egg-shell.'

Sartwell nervously clenched his right hand, as if the egg-shell were within it.

'I am sorry for the men, father.'

'So am I, my dear, if they stand out; but it will be their own fault. Experience is said to teach a specified class of individuals; and they are preparing for themselves a bitter dose of it.'

'Will you not take him back, even if they hold out?'

'Him? Whom? Oh, Marston. If they do not come back in a body, I will never allow another Union man to set foot in the Works again. But never mind the men; I want to talk about yourself.'

'About me?'

'Yes. About the situation here at home. It is not

exactly what I wish it to be, and I intend to try an experiment.'

'Do you mean what happened yesterday between mother and me?'

'I mean the whole situation. What happened yesterday was merely an indication of the tendency—I don't know just how to put it, but it isn't satisfactory.'

'I was in fault, father, as I said last night; I was worried and anxious—that is no excuse, of course—and then I said things I shouldn't have said. I was sorry at once, but I am more sorry now when I see I have troubled you. It won't happen again. I shall be very careful in future, and I am sure, if you think no more about it, I shall do better.'

'My dear Edna, I am not blaming you in the least, nor do I think you were in fault; that is, not entirely. I am not censuring any one; we are as God made us, and there are differences of temperament which sometimes cause friction. You are not having a fair chance just now. I care very little about your mother's friends, and I have few friends of my own; thus you have no companions of your own age whom you can have here, and whose visits you can return, as is right and proper. You are thrown too much on your mother and me for companionship; and I am not sure that either of us is suitable. You are at an impressionable time of life, and I want to do my best for you; so I think I shall send you to some college for young ladies where you will meet nice girls and form friendships which you will enjoy. Then, you have a decided talent for music, which will be developed, and—there are many reasons for such a step.'

'Do you mean that I shall have to leave home?' asked Edna, with a tremor in her voice.

'I think that will be best. In a year or two you will look upon life with perhaps more philosophy.'

'A year or two!' cried Edna, as if she spoke of eternity.

Her father smiled.

'The time will pass very quickly,' he said. 'In a year or two, when you come home, both your mother and you will be glad to meet each other. We sometimes grow to think kindly of the absent.'

The girl buried her face in her hands.

'Tut, tut, Edna, my own little girl,' cried her father, placing his chair beside hers and taking her almost in his arms. 'One would think you were being sent off to Africa. I imagined you would be glad.'

'It isn't that,' she sobbed. 'It shows how dreadfully wicked you must think me when you are compelled to send me away.'

'Nonsense, Edna. It shows nothing of the kind. I can't send your step-mother to a boarding-school, can I? Well, then, I don't think you wicked at all; I have not the slightest doubt you said just what you were provoked into saying. There, now; see what a hopeless admission that is to make to a rebellious daughter. No, no. I am not blaming you in the least. As I said before, I am blaming nobody. We are driven by circumstances, that is all.'

'And am I never to see you except when I come home?'

'My darling girl, that is the delightful part of it. You will see me, and I shall see you, even more often than now. What do you think of that? I shall select some excellent college situated in a bracing spot near the sea. I believe it will be cheaper for me to buy a season ticket on the railway, I shall go down so often. We will take long walks on the downs entirely alone, and talk of everything. We will have delightful little dinners at the wayside inns we discover, and now and then a grand luncheon at some very expensive place, with a window that looks over the Channel. Edna, it will be the rejuvenating of

your old father. He rarely gets a sniff of ozone as things are now, but then——'

Edna with a cry of joy flung her arms around his neck.

'Oh, father,' she cried, 'that is too good to be true. When may I go?'

'This very week, I hope. You see now how everything depends on the point of view.'

CHAPTER XIX

WITH the words 'starved to death' ringing in his ears, Langly walked to Chelsea. Bitterly he accused himself of stupid blindness; all this had been going on for days, and he had had no suspicion of it. She had from the first undoubtedly stinted herself so that her father might not go hungry; and when at last the real pinch came, she was too weak to resist it. Her father, isolated by his temper from any friends who might have seen what was happening and given warning in time, had also been unconscious of what was passing before his eyes. His gruff independence had slowly famished his own daughter.

'Starved to death!' In the richest city on earth—in that granary of the nation whose ample lap is overflowing with golden wheat from every country under the sun!

At last Langly reached the studio, and he might have known, had he been conversant with the habits of the great world, that a notable function was in progress, by the numerous carriages that waited near by with fine horses and resplendent coachmen and footmen. In his earlier days Langly had hoped for pupils to instruct, that he might thus increase his scanty income. He had cards printed—'Albert Langly' in the centre, and 'Teacher of music' in smaller type at the corner. These were never used, Langly not having the courage to push his inquiries

for pupils and to secure them. He, knowing Barney to be a fashionable man, had put some of these cards in his pocket; and when the boy in buttons swung open the door, a bit of pasteboard was handed to him. The boy glanced at the card, dropped it into the receptacle which contained many others, and shouted Langly's name up the stair-way, seeming to waft its ascent with a flourish of his hand. The man who held aside the heavy drapery which covered the doorway bawled the name into the room; from which a confused murmur of conversation came, mingled now and then with a pleasing ripple of laughter. The ornamental living statue at the top of the stair gazed dreamily over Langly's head as he mounted.

Taking another card, the organist gave it to the man at the door. 'I have not come to the "At Home,"' he said. 'Would you give this to Mr. Hope, and ask if he will see me for a moment? Tell him I called last night, and could not come earlier to-day.'

The man took the card and disappeared behind the curtains. In an incredibly short time Barney came out, and his reception of the musician was bewilderingly effusive.

'My dear fellow,' he cried, placing a hand on each shoulder of Langly, 'can you play the piano? Of course you can; what a foolish question to ask! I always alight on my feet. Providence has dropped you down here, my boy, don't you know. Here are we, having just sent out to scour Chelsea for a pianist, and here you drop right down from the skies, don't you know. This is luck. Want to see me? Of course you do; and what's more to the point, I want to see you, don't you *know*. Now come straight in. I've got the finest grand piano you ever fingered in your life—magnificent instrument; case designed by myself; told 'em to spare no expense, and they didn't, don't you know. Trust 'em for that. Now come in, come in.'

'Mr. Hope, I did not come to play: I am in no condition for playing.'

'Of course you didn't come to play. That's the beauty of it. You want something from me; now, don't you?'

'Yes; and if you will give me a moment——'

'A thousand of 'em, my boy—a thousand of 'em; but not just now. Listen to me. You want something I've got, and I want something you've got. Very well. All England's prosperity is based on just that position of things. Our commerce is founded on it. Our mutual country is great merely because she knows what she wants, and because she has something the other fellow wants, don't you *know*. Now, I need a man who can play dance music, and I need him now—not to-morrow, or the day after, or next week. You see what I mean? Good. You come in and polish off some waltzes for us on the new piano. Then when it's all over I'll let you have what you want—if it's half my kingdom, as the story-books say. Thus we will both be happy, don't you know.'

'I am organist at St. Martyrs' Church. I can't——'

'That's all right. Don't apologize. You can play the piano as well as the organ; I know that by the look of you. Come in, come in.'

Barney triumphantly dragged the reluctant musician after him.

'I've got him,' he cried, at which there was a clatter of applause and laughter. 'Now, there,' said Barney, jubilantly, seating Langly before the grand piano, which had its great lid propped up like a dragon's wing. 'There's all the sheet music any reasonable man can want, but if you prefer something else, I'll send out for it; and there's the piano—"come, let us hear its tune," as the poet says.'

The rugs which usually covered the waxed floor had been cleared away; the chairs had been pushed into corners and against the walls. There was much

laughter and many protestations that the visitors had not come prepared for a dance; but all were unquestionably eager for the fun to begin.

'You see you are in Bohemia,' cried Barney, beaming joyously on his many guests, 'and the delight of Bohemia is unconventionality. I danced after the theatre till daylight this morning, and I am ready to begin again. Shall we not lunch because we have breakfasted, and because we dine at seven? Quite otherwise. I am ready for a dance any time of the night or day. Now, Mr. Musician, strike up. "On with the dance, let joy be unconfined," as the other poet says.'

Langly could not have played out of time or tune if he had tried. The piano, as Barney had truly said, was a splendid instrument; and when the gay waltz-music filled the large room, many couples began to glide lightly over the polished floor. The musician played on and on, mechanically yet brilliantly; and in the pauses between the dances more than one of the guests spoke to their host of the music's excellence.

'Oh yes,' said Barney, with a jaunty wave of the hand, 'he's one of my finds. The man's a genius, don't you know, and is in music what I am myself in painting.'

'Barney, you always lay it on too thick,' said one of the young men. 'You'll turn the pianist's head with flattery if he knows you consider him as clever as yourself.'

'Perhaps you imagine I'm too dense to see through that remark,' said Barney, with the condescension of true genius. 'I know your sneering ways; but let me tell you what I meant was that both the musician and myself are unrecognized by the mob of commonplace people of whom you are so distinguished a representative.—I flatter myself I had him there,' whispered Barney aside to the lady on his right.

'Yes, my boy, the day will come when you will be

proud to say you were invited to these receptions, which I intend to make one of the artistic features of London society.'

'Why, Barney,' protested the young man, 'I'm proud of it now. I make myself objectionable in all my clubs by continually bragging that you smile upon me. I claim that you are in art what the Universal Provider is in commerce.'

'Do get him to play something, while we are resting,' murmured the lady, thus pouring oil on the troubled waters.

Langly sat at the piano, a disconsolate figure, paying no attention to the hum of conversation around him. His thoughts were far away, in the squalid room where the dead girl lay. Barney bustled up to him, and the musician came to himself with a start on being spoken to.

'Here are several Hungarian mazurkas—weird things—you'll like 'em. Just polish off a few for us while we have some tea, will you? They are all complimenting your playing—they're people who know a good thing when they hear it. Won't you have some refreshment yourself before you begin?'

Langly shook his head, and began playing the Hungarian music. Barney sat down again beside the lady, smiling with satisfaction at being able to pose as the patron of so accomplished a musician. The lady, her chin resting on her hand, listened intently.

'How marvellously he plays those mazurkas!' she whispered, softly. 'He brings out that diabolical touch which seems to be in much of the Polish and Hungarian music.'

'Yes,' assented Barney, cordially, 'he does play like the devil, yet he is an organist in a church. Ah, well, I suppose Beelzebub looks after our music as he does our morals.'

'Has he composed anything?'

'Who, Satan?'

'No, no. You know very well I'm speaking of the organist.'

'Composed! Well, rather. He's an unrecognized genius, but I'm going to look after his recognition. I'm going to bring out some of his works, if he'll let me. He's a very modest man, and——'

'Another likeness to yourself.'

'Exactly, exactly. I'm always pushing other people forward and neglecting my own interests; still, I'll arrive one of these days and astonish you all, don't you know. You see, our set doesn't produce men of genius like that organist. The Upper Ten never produced a Shakespeare.'

'I thought it did. Didn't Lord Bacon write Shakespeare?'

'No, he didn't. I've looked up that question, but there's nothing in it, don't you know. No, the really great men come from the common people. The world doesn't know where to look for them, but I do, and I find 'em, just as I found this man. I go for my society to the aristocracy, but for my geniuses to the democracy.'

'But if society does not produce great men, how do you hope to become the greatest of painters?'

'Ah, painting's a different thing, don't you know; it has always been the gentleman's art. Leonardo and all of those chaps were great swells. Rubens—or was it Titian? one of them anyhow—went as Ambassador to the Court of Spain in great pomp. Painters have always been the companions of kings. But, I say, let us have another dance.'

Once more the dreamy waltz-music mingled with the swish-swish of silken skirts, sibilant on the polished floor. Langly nearly always lost himself in whatever music he played, but now it merely dulled his sorrow, and an undertone of deep grief lay beneath the frivolous harmony which rippled so smoothly and sweetly from the piano—an undertone heard by none save

himself. Merry laughter, and now and then a whispered phrase as the dancers swung close to where he sat, fell on his unheeding ear; and he wished his task were done, so that he might face again the long walk which he had before him.

He chided himself for being ungrateful, when it seemed hard that at this time he should be called upon to minister to the amusement of a pleasure-loving party; but he remembered that the Hebrew had toiled seven years uncomplaining for the woman he loved, and why should he grudge an afternoon, when the object was practically the same, although hope cheered the longer task, and despair clouded the shorter? Each in his way laboured for his love, living or dead.

The heavy hand of Barney came down unexpectedly on the thinly clad shoulder of the player, and partially aroused him from his bitter reverie.

'First-rate, my boy, first-rate. You've done nobly, and every one is delighted—charmed—they are, indeed, I assure you. Now they're saying good-bye, so give us a rousing march for the farewell—anything you like—something of your own would be just the thing; you see what I mean—a march with a suggestion of regret in it—sorry they're going, don't you know.'

Barney hurried back to his guests, shaking hands, asking them to come again, and receiving gushing thanks for a most agreeable afternoon. Suddenly there knelled forth amid the murmurs of farewell the solemn notes of the 'Funeral March,' like the measured toll of a passing bell. The metallic clangour of the instrument gave a vibrant thrill to the sombre music, which was lacking in the smooth round tones of the organ. Langly played like a man entranced, his head thrown back, his pale face turned upward, seeming as if life had left it. An instantaneous chilling hush fell on the assemblage, as though an icy wind had swept through the room, freezing into silence the animated

stream of conversation. Some shivered where they stood, and a girl, clasping her cloak at her throat, paused, and said, half hysterically,—

'If this is a joke, Mr. Hope, I must say I don't like it.'

'Cursed bad taste, if you ask me,' muttered one man, hurrying away.

'Oh, I say!' cried Barney, as much shocked as any one at the inopportune performance, and striding towards the player, as soon as his wits came to him, 'we didn't want a dirge, don't you know.'

The lady who had spoken in praise of Langly's music laid a detaining hand on Barney's arm.

'Hush,' she said, gently, the glimmer of tears in her eyes; 'don't stop him. Listen. That man is inspired. I never heard Chopin played like this before.'

'Oh, it's Chopin, is it?' murmured Barney, apologetically, as if, had he known it, he would not have interfered.

The throng dissolved rapidly with the unwelcome chords ringing in the ears of the visitors, leaving Barney and his guest standing there alone.

Langly, on finishing the March, remained where he was seated, his long arms drooping by his side.

'Wouldn't you like to speak to him?' asked Barney.

'No, not now.' The lady stole softly out, Barney following her to the landing at the head of the stairs. 'Please don't lose sight of him,' she said, giving Barney her hand. 'I want you to ask him here again and let me invite the guests.'

'I'll do it,' said Barney, enthusiastically. 'That will be awfully jolly.'

'No, it won't be jolly, Mr. Hope, but we'll hear some enchanting music. Good-bye.'

Barney re-entered the room, and found Langly standing beside the piano like a man awakened from a dream, apparently not quite knowing where he was.

'You must have something to drink,' cried Barney,

cordially. 'You look fagged out, and no wonder. I never heard Chopin so well rendered before. I tell you, my boy, you get all out of a piano that's in it, don't you know. Now, will you have whisky or brandy?'

Langly thanked him, but refused both beverages. He had a long walk before him and was anxious to get away, he said.

'Walk?' cried Barney. 'Nonsense. Why should you walk, and thus insult every self-respecting cabby you meet? I'll see about the walking; I hope I know my duty towards the hansom industry.'

Barney touched an electric bell, and when his man appeared, said to him—

'Just send Buttons to the King's Road for a hansom. When it comes, give the cabby ten shillings, and tell him that he belongs to his fare for four hours. Ask him to wait at the door till his fare comes, and meanwhile, bring in some whisky and soda. Now, Mr. Organist—I always forget names—ah, Langly, here it is on the card, of course—have you ever composed any music yourself? I thought so. Ever published any? I thought not. Well, my boy, we must remedy all that. You're too modest; I can see that. Now, modesty doesn't pay in London. I know, because I suffer from it myself. Heavens! If I only had the cheek of some men, I would be the most famous painter in Europe. If you bring a few of your compositions to me, I'll get a publisher for you. Will you promise? Nonsense; not worthy? Bosh! Compared with the great composers? My dea. fellow, the great composers were all very well in their way, I've no doubt, but they were once poor devils like you. Because Raphael painted, is that any reason why I should not improve on him? Not a bit of it. You and I will be old masters in music and painting some few centuries hence; you just wait and see. The great point is to realize that you're an old master while you're young

and can do something. If you don't recognize the fact yourself, you may be jolly well sure no one else will—at least, not in time to do you any good here below. Do have some whisky—it's cheering and comforting, as the advertisements say. Well, here's to you.'

'I came to see you, Mr. Hope,' stammered Langly, diffidently, 'because Marston, one of your father's employés, told me he thought you might—that you were good enough to help once——'

'Oh yes, I remember Marston. He was here about some fellow knocking down a few policemen. Well, has he knocked down some more?'

'No, but he is in great trouble, Mr. Hope.'

'Such a man is sure to be; how much is the fine?'

'His only daughter died yesterday.'

'Oh, I'm very sorry to hear it, very sorry indeed.'

'He has no money, and none of the men have any. Braunt will ask no one for help, but I know that he fears there will have to be—— He doesn't want her to be buried as a pauper—and I thought——'

'Of course, of course. I see it all. I never could understand the feeling of the poor on that subject. They seem to like a fine funeral, as if that mattered. I confess, that if you give me good company while I'm alive, you may do what you please with me when I'm dead. I would just as soon lie beside a pauper as a prince, but I prefer the prince when I'm above ground. Now, how much will be needed? Of course, you don't know; no more do I. Here are three fivers; if more is wanted just telegraph me, and I'll send it by messenger at once, don't you know. No, you mustn't think of sending any of it back. Use the surplus, if there is a surplus, for some charity or another. But you must come back yourself, and we'll have a talk on music. Drop in any time; there's no ceremony here. And just write your address on this card, so that I may communicate with you. I pro-

mised a lady to have you here some day to play for a few friends—you won't disappoint me, will you? Thanks, I'm ever so much obliged.'

'The hansom is here, sir,' said the man, entering.

'All right. I'll just see you into your cab, Mr.—er—Langly. No trouble at all; don't mention it. You can make this fellow drive you round for four hours, if you want to; he'd take you to Brighton in that time, so I suppose he'll land you anywhere in London and consider himself lucky. Well, good-bye, my dear fellow, and I thank you ever so much for your exquisite music.'

CHAPTER XX

AFTER the burial of his daughter, Braunt sat in his lonely room and pondered bitterly upon the failure his life had been, ever since he could remember. Hard and incessant toil he did not complain of; that was his lot, and it had been the lot of his fathers. He was able to work, and willing; the work was there waiting to be done, yet through the action of the men over whom he had not the slightest control, he was doomed to idleness and starvation, until the capricious minds of others changed, and the signal was given to pick up the tools which had been so heedlessly dropped.

'Ah'll not stand it,' he cried aloud, bringing his fist down on the empty table.

But after these momentary flashes of determination, the depression habitual to him settled down with increased density upon his mind; and realizing how helpless he was, he buried his face in his hands and groaned in abject despair. It is difficult for a starving man to be brave for long. What could he do? Absolutely nothing. He might drop dead from exhaustion before he got a chance to earn a meal, though he tramped all over the huge city searching for work. The trade which he had learned in his youth was already overcrowded with thousands of men eager for the place he had been compelled to abandon. Even the street-crossings were owned by impoverished wretches

who earned what living they got by sweeping narrow paths across the thoroughfares. If he were presented with a crossing, he had not the money to buy a broom. Gibbons, fool though he might be, spoke the truth when he said that a working-man was but a cog on a large wheel; the wheel might have a new cog or half a dozen new cogs fitted to it; but the cog separated from the wheel was as useless as a bit of old iron.

While Braunt sat with his head in his hands, Langly stole stealthily in upon his stricken friend, closing the door softly after him, with the bearing of a man about to commit a crime and certain of being caught. Braunt gave him no greeting, but glowered upon him from under his frowning, shaggy eyebrows.

'There is some money here that you are to take,' said the organist, timidly placing a heap of coins on the table.

Braunt, with an angry gesture, swept away the pile, and the gold and silver jingled on the floor.

'Ah'll have none o' thy money, as Ah've told 'e before,' he roared. 'Ah can earn ma money if ah boot get th' chance.'

Langly, with no word of remonstrance, stooped and patiently collected every scattered piece.

'It is not my money,' he said, on rising. 'It was sent to you, and is for you and for no one else. It belongs to you; I have no right to it, and this very money you yourself have helped to earn; I don't know who has a better claim to it.'

Again placing the silver and gold on the table, Langly tip-toed out of the room in some haste, before Braunt could gather his wits and make reply.

The Yorkshireman, with curious inconsistency, had accepted without question the money which had saved his child from a pauper's funeral, although he must have known that the expenses were paid by some one; yet charity which did not come direct, awakened

no resentment in his turbulent nature, while a bald offer of money or food sent him instantly into a tempest of anger.

He thought over the organist's words. How could the money be his? How had he earned the coins? His slow brain gradually solved the problem: the money evidently had come from Hope or Monkton, or, perhaps, from Sartwell. He cursed the three of them, together and separately, and in his rage once more scattered the heap on the floor. The coins whirled hither and thither, at last spinning to rest on the bare boards. Braunt watched them as they lay there glittering in the dim light, his mind ceasing to cogitate as to the respective culpability of employers or employed for the state of things under which he suffered.

He had formerly thought of Monkton and Hope as purse-proud, haughty capitalists, until he saw their cringing, frightened demeanour when escorted out of the Works by the policemen; and since that time he had been endeavouring to reconstruct his ideas concerning them. So, after all, why should he refuse to take money from them if one or other had sent it? He gazed at the coins on the floor—white splotches and yellow points of light; and he hitched round his chair the better to see them. He had heard that a man might be hypnotized by gazing steadily on a silver piece held in the palm.

As Braunt watched the coins intently, he passed his hand swiftly across his brow, concentrating his gaze by half-closing his eyes. He leaned forward and downward. Surely they were moving, edging closer to each other, the larger heaps attracting the various atoms of metal—as he remembered, with bewildered brain, was the case with money all the world over—which gave a plausible explanation such as one has in dreams, of the coins creeping together, although what was left of his reason told him that it was all an illusion.

The sane and insane sections of his mind struggled for mastery, while Braunt leaned closer and closer over the money, sitting forward now on the very edge of his chair, breathing hard, almost wholly absorbed in the strange movement which he seemed to see on the floor, and gradually losing interest in the mental conflict regarding the reality of that which his strained, unwinking eyes told him was going on at his feet. At last he noticed that the heap was slowly, but perceptibly sliding away from him. All doubts about the genuineness of what he saw vanished. The money was trying to escape. He sprang to his feet and jumped to the door, placing his back against it.

'Oh no,' he shouted, 'ye're mine, ye're mine!'

Crouching down, never taking his eyes from the coins, he got upon his hands and knees, crawling towards them craftily, then pounced suddenly on the main heap, while the isolated pieces scuttled back to their former positions, pretending they had never shifted their places. He laughed sneeringly at their futile efforts to deceive him, thrust the heap into his pocket, and captured each separate coin which remained, by springing upon it. He searched the whole room like some animal, peering into the corners, crouching lower and proceeding more cautiously when he spied a silver or gold piece which had rolled far; chuckling when he seized it and placed it with the others. At last he rose to his feet—slapping his pocket joyously, and making the money jingle. Once erect, the blood rushed to his head, causing him to feel dizzy. He staggered and leaned against the wall, all his hilarity leaving him. The room seemed to swim around him, and he covered his eyes with his hands.

'Ah'm gooin' mad,' he whispered. 'Ah moost ha' summet ta eat—or drink.'

Braunt staggered through the doorway to the passage and down the stairs, out into the open air, which

revived him and made him feel the nip of hunger again. Once in Light Street, he turned into the 'Rose and Crown' and asked for a mug of beer. The barman hesitated. The credit of the strikers had long since gone.

'I'd like to see the colour of your money,' he said, gruffly.

'Ah've no money. Ah'll pay thee next week; Ah'm goin' to put a stop to th' strike to-day.' He brought down his open palm against his trousers pocket to emphasize his poverty, and was startled by the clink of coins. He thrust his hand down into his pocket and pulled out some silver, gazing at it stupidly. 'Ma word,' he gasped at last, 'Ah thought Ah dreamt it.'

The barman laughed, and reached for an empty mug, grasping the beer-pump handle.

'That dream's good enough for the "Crown,"' he said. 'Better have some bread and cheese with it.'

'Yes. Be quick, man.'

Standing there, Braunt ate and drank ravenously.

'I can get you a plate of cold meat,' said the barman, seeing how hungry his customer was. The other nodded, and the plate, with knife and fork, was placed before him.'

'So the strike's off, is it?' said the man, leaning his arms on the bar.

'It'll be off when Ah get there.'

'Well, it's not a minute too soon. Our trade's suffered.'

'More than thy trade has suffered, worse luck. Dom little ye'll do for a man unless th' money's in ta pouch.'

'Oh, if it comes to that, neither will other people. We're not giving out-door relief, any more than our neighbours.'

Braunt ate his food and drank his beer, but made no reply. The barman's attitude was commercially

correct; no one could justly find fault with it. Money is the master-key of the universe; it unlocks all doors. The barman did not care how Braunt came by it, so long as he paid for what was ordered; and the workman now found that courage was taking the place of despair, merely because he had money in his pocket. He felt that he had energy enough to cope with the strikers, simply because he had fed while they were hungry. He would wait for no meeting, but would harangue the men in the street, those of them who were assembled in little groups about the closed gates; and most of them were sure to be there. If Gibbons opposed he would settle the question by promptly and conclusively knocking him down: an argument easily comprehended by all on-lookers.

Braunt drew the back of his hand across his lips when he had finished his meal, and departed for the Works. He found, as he expected, despondent men standing there, with hands hopelessly thrust deep into empty pockets. Their pipes were as smokeless as the tall chimneys of the factory; which of itself showed that their condition was at its lowest ebb. They were listening with listless indifference to a heated altercation going on between Gibbons and Marston, as if the subject discussed did not concern them.

'You might have played that card last week,' Marston cried, 'but it is too late now. You can have no conference with the owners. I tell you they have left the country, and won't return for a fortnight, and by that time the Works will be filled with new men. The new men are coming in on Monday. I demand that the committee call a meeting now, and that a vote be taken.'

'Don't mind him,' cried Gibbons. 'He's in Sartwell's pay.'

The men did not mind him, and paid no attention to Gibbons either. What they wanted was something

to eat and drink, with tobacco to smoke afterwards. If Marston were in Sartwell's pay, they would gladly have changed places with him. Braunt made his way roughly through the crowd, elbowing the men rudely aside. None resented this; all the fight had gone out of them. Marston seemed on the point of attacking Gibbons for the slanderous remark made, when he felt Braunt's heavy hand on his shoulder.

'The time is past for meetings, lad,' said the big man, 'and for talk, too. The meeting's here, and Ah'll deal wi' it. Stop bothering wi' that fool, and stand among the crowd ready to back me oop if need be.'

Marston at once did as requested, while Braunt strode across the open space in spite of the warning of a policeman to stand back. Few of the force were on the ground; the authorities saw there was little to fear from cowed and beaten men.

'You'll have to stand back,' said the officer, 'or I'll take you in charge.'

'Will ye so?' cried Braunt, truculently, rolling up his sleeves as he turned upon his opponent. 'Then I warn ye—send for help. Ye haven't men enooph here to tak me in charge. Ah've had a meal to-day.' After glaring for a moment, Braunt turned and strode unmolested to the closed gate.

The officer paid heed to the advice given him, and sent for more men. He saw there was likely to be trouble of some sort.

Braunt smote his huge fist against the panels, and roared at the top of his voice—

'*Open the gates!*'

A slight flutter of listless interest seemed to pass over the crowd. The men elbowed closer together, shuffling their feet and craning their necks forward. Those to the rear pressed towards the front, wondering what was about to happen. The few policemen looked on without interfering, waiting for reinforce-

ments. Braunt, with his fist, beat against the sounding timbers, the rhythmical thuds being the only breaks in the stillness, except when he repeated his stentorian cry—

'*Open the gates!*'

The porter at the small wicket, fearing an attack, ran for Sartwell, and met the manager coming down the stairs.

'I'm afraid there's going to be another riot, sir,' said the porter, breathlessly. Sartwell did not answer, but walked quickly to the small gate, unbolted it, and stepped out.

'What do you want?' he said.

'We want oor work,' cried Braunt. 'Open the gates.'

Sartwell's glance swept swiftly over the men, who stood with jaws dropped, their gaunt faces and wolfish eyes turned towards the closed barriers. The manager quickly comprehended that it was no time for discussion or the arranging of terms. What was needed was action, sharp and prompt. He turned towards the trembling porter and said, peremptorily,—

'Throw down the bar.'

Whatever doubts the man may have had about the wisdom of such an order in the face of a hostile mob, he preferred to brave probable danger from the crowd rather than the certain wrath of the manager; and he obeyed the command with all possible haste. The heavy gates were slowly pushed open.

'Now, men, in with ye, cried Braunt, with a scythe-like swing of his long arm. 'The man that holds oot now—God!—Ah'll break his back.'

Some one stumbled forward as if pushed from behind; then it was as if an invisible rope holding the crowd back had suddenly broken. The men poured through the open gateway in a steady stream. Gibbons, waving his hands like a maniac, cried—

'Stop! stop! Listen to me for a moment!'

But no one stopped, and no one listened. Braunt, his face white with anger, struggled against the incoming tide, shouting—

'Let me get at him! Ah'll strangle th' whelp!'

'Braunt,' said Sartwell, sharply, his voice cutting through the din made by shuffling boots. 'Leave him alone, and get inside yourself. Gather the men together in the yard. I want a word with them.'

Braunt's truculence at once disappeared. He turned with the men and came to where Sartwell was standing grimly watching the moving throng. No one glanced towards the manager, but each went doggedly forward, with head bent down as though ashamed of what he was doing. Braunt stopped at Sartwell's side and whispered—

'For God's sake, manager, set 'em at work, and don't talk to 'em. They're beaten, and there's no more to be said. Be easy wi' 'em; there's been talk enooph.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Sartwell, in a kindly manner. 'Don't be afraid, but gather them together. You have the voice for it. I heard in my office your first shout at the gates.'

As the last man passed through, Sartwell heard Braunt calling them to halt. A few still remained outside; Scimmins and his fellow-members of the strike committee listening gloomily to Gibbons's frantic denunciation of the wholesale defection. The manager stepped inside, and ordered the wondering porter to close the gates.

Then, as Sartwell walked briskly towards the Works, he saw the men huddled together like sheep, very crestfallen, and evidently ready to endure any censure the manager might see fit to launch at their defenceless heads. Braunt, towering over them, looked anxiously about him with the air of a huge dog who was not quite certain how his flock would behave.

Sartwell mounted the steps leading to the door of the office, and spoke.

'I take it, men,' he said, 'that this strike is off. I want to begin fair and square, so if there is any among you unwilling to go back to work on my terms, let him stand out now and say so.'

There was a short pause, during which the silence was unbroken. No one stepped out.

'Very well,' continued the manager. That's settled and done with. Now, each man knows his place in these buildings; let him get there and remain for further instructions. No work will be done to-day, as some preparation is required before we begin; but after arrangements for work have been made, you may each draw half a week's wages in advance from the cashier; I shall give orders to that effect. As you are back, the telegrams which I was prepared to send off on Saturday need not go; and I will spend the money thus saved in tobacco, of which each man can get a share as he passes out through the small gate. The large gates will not be open until to-morrow morning; and I shall expect to see you all here at the usual hour.'

There was a faint, wavering cheer as Sartwell stopped speaking and stepped down. The men then slowly filtered into the Works.

CHAPTER XXI

GIBBONS knew that Monkton and Hope had gone to the Continent before Marston shouted out this bit of information in the street to the men. He saw that the game was up; and all he wanted was time in which to beat a retreat, posing, if possible, as the man who had brought about a settlement. As soon as Gibbons had learned that the two nominal masters were gone, he tried to open communications with Sartwell, and sent a private letter to him, saying that, taking into consideration the privations of the men, and the large money loss to the firm, he was willing to sink all personal feelings and waive the proviso heretofore insisted upon regarding a meeting between the manager and himself. Gibbons manifested his inclination to withdraw from the conflict, and expressed a desire to get a committee of the men appointed which would wait upon Sartwell to arrange for the termination of the strike; but he asked that his letter might be regarded as confidential.

Sartwell, with perhaps unnecessary contempt, returned the letter to Gibbons, saying curtly to the bearer that there was no answer.

It is usually unwise to humiliate unduly a beaten adversary; but Sartwell was not versed in the finer arts of courtesy, and, when he hated a man, he hated

him thoroughly, caring little for any reprisal which his enemy might attempt.

Gibbons had ground his teeth in helpless rage when his letter was returned to him. He saw that no concession he could make would placate Sartwell; so, as the strike was doomed to failure, he resolved to make the best of the inevitable retreat. The committee agreed that it was no longer possible to hold out, although they had refused Marston's request that a meeting be called and a vote taken. It was resolved that they should convene a meeting at once, not waiting for nightfall (hoping in this way to deprive Marston of any credit which might accrue from the surrender), and march the men in a body from the hall to the Works, where the committee, with the exception of Gibbons, would precede them, to induce the manager to open the gates. Gibbons would then be able to say that he, not Marston, had ended the strike; and he might even enact the rôle of a benefactor, who had sacrificed his own feelings in the interests of the men.

But luck was against Gibbons that day. When he reached the Works he found Marston there haranguing his fellow-workmen, imploring them to give in before it was too late, assuring them that the twin buildings would be full of workers on Monday, and then all efforts to enter would be fruitless. It was very apparent that the young man was already angered at the slight effect which his appeal was making on the men; and, if Gibbons had been less irritated at the rebuff received from the manager, he might have taken advantage of the position, and scored a point. As it was, he had little time for planning any new line of procedure. The moment he appeared, Marston demanded that a meeting be called instantly and a vote taken. Gibbons asked him to mind his own business, saying he had an appointment with the owners of the Works, and that there would be a meeting to consider

their reply. Then Gibbons learned that his falsehood was useless, and that Marston knew the owners had fled.

At this instant the unexpected advent of Braunt, and the results which followed, tumbled all the secretary's schemes to the ground like a house of cards.

Braunt, if he gave thought to the matter (which he did not), would have seen he was revenged at the end of the strike for his ignominious ejection from the hall at the beginning.

Gibbons retired with the committee to consult upon the new situation. It was a gloomy consultation. As the men came out of the small gate one by one, each with half a week's wages in his pocket and a packet of tobacco in his hand, Scimmins and another member of the committee stood outside, proclaiming that a meeting was called for that night, to discuss the events of the day in a friendly manner. No man answered; each hurried away to get something to eat or drink; nor did any appear later at Salvation Hall. Next morning Scimmins and his fellow-committeemen applied to Sartwell for reinstatement, and were given their old places. Gibbons resigned the secretaryship of the Union, and his resignation was accepted, somewhat to his surprise: as he, knowing the men had been practically unanimous in bringing on the strike, expected to be asked to keep the office, with perhaps a formal vote of thanks. However, all blame for the failure was promptly placed on his shoulders, and he found himself suddenly called upon to seek another situation. His bitterness against Sartwell deepened into virulent hatred; and he heaped maledictions on the heads of the men whom so short a time since he had swayed, this way and that, whenever he addressed them.

The morning after the surrender, the gates stood invitingly open, and black smoke poured from the tall chimneys. The women and girls, who worked on the

upper floors, were the first to come; and their pale faces turned in a look of mute thankfulness towards the banner of smoke flying above them like a signal of rescue. They had had no voice in bringing on the strike, and no voice in its cessation. No one during its continuance had taken the trouble to learn whether they lived or died when strike pay ceased.

Before the day was done, work was going as smoothly as if nothing had happened. The men were at first afraid that Sartwell might pick and choose among them, and that some of them might be marked men because of what had been done on the day of the riot; but it soon became evident that no distinction was to be made.

Just as the men had settled down to a comfortable frame of mind regarding the point which had given them anxiety, they were startled from their complacency by an unexpected incident. Marston was discharged. On the first regular pay-day the young man received what was due to him, and a month's money besides. The cashier told him that his services would no longer be required in the factory. Marston was so dazed by this unlooked-for intimation that he asked no explanation, but walked away with his money in his hand. He knew well why he had been so unceremoniously dismissed; but it seemed to him unfair that the manager should use his power against him for what was entirely a personal quarrel, due not to any fault found with his work. He counted the money automatically three or four times, without the process conveying to his mind anything definite about the sum which had been paid him. At last he noticed that Sartwell had apparently ordered four times as much to be given him as was legally his due with a notice to quit. Marston went back to the cashier, and said—

'There's a month's money here: I am only entitled to a week's notice.'

'You'd better keep what you've got,' replied the cashier. 'I was told to pay you a month's wages and discharge you. The money isn't mine; it's yours, and you're a fool if you part with it for nothing.'

'I'll take only what is my due,' said Marston. 'Give the remainder to Mr. Sartwell, and tell him I want none of his generosity.'

'It's no affair of mine,' remarked the cashier. 'I suppose you know what the trouble is—I don't. If you are wise you won't send any such message to the manager, but will go quietly and see him. Perhaps a few words of explanation may set matters right; anyhow, nothing is to be gained by flying into a temper about it. That isn't the way to get back into the Works.'

'I'm not in a temper,' replied Marston, 'and I'm not going back into the Works—no, not if Sartwell asks me to. You may tell him that when I come back it will be as real master of these shops, with his power broken—you may tell him that.'

'Oh, very well. If you think to frighten a man like Mr. Sartwell with great talk, you'll be disappointed.'

Marston turned away, and found Braunt standing outside the gates.

'Ah'm waitin' for 'ee, lad, and Ah thought ye might 'a gone oot wi' first lot, but porter said thou hadn't. Coom whoam wi' me, Marston; Ah'm main lonely, an' want some 'un ta speak wi'. Ah donno what's wrong wi' me, but there's summat. Ma head's queer. Ah'm hearin' the "Dead March" night and day, an' it's soundin' solemner an' solemner till it frightens me. Will ye walk wi' me, lad?'

'Yes, willingly. Don't you find your work makes things easier? I thought that would help.'

'Ah've been too long idle, lad. Work doesn't do what it used to. Ah used to lose maself in't, but

now Ah just seem in a dream, thinkin', thinkin'; an' when one speaks ta me sudden, Ah've to pull maself back from a distance like, before Ah can understand what's said; an' all th' while the throb o' the machinery is beatin' out the "Dead March." Once or twice Ah've seen Langly sittin' playin' at the far end o' the room wi' the machines all answerin' to his fingers, while Ah knew he'd ne'er been i' the shops in's life. Ah've stood there wi' ma jaw hangin' an' wi' people lookin' at me curious. Then when Ah'd rubbed ma eyes, Langly was gone, but the machinery kept on an' on.'

'Oh, you mustn't think too much about what is past, Braunt. Everything will be all right in a little while. Stick hard at your work; that's the main thing. You are foreman of the upper room now, aren't you?'

'Yes. Sartwell's been kind ta me. Ah! he's a man, Sartwell is. There's no waverin' about him.'

'That's true.'

'He sticks ba them as sticks ba him, as a man should. Has he said anythin' to ye, since the strike ended?'

'No.'

'Thou'rt yoong, but thy time'll coom. Ye stand ba Sartwell an' he'll see ye through. He knows how you tried to end the strike, an' he'll not forget. Ah'll drop in a word for ye when Ah get th' chance.'

'I wish you wouldn't do that.'

'Why? It'll do 'e no harm.'

'It will do no good.'

Braunt paused in his walk and looked closely at his companion. 'What's the matter wi' thee, lad? Ye seem cast down, an' here Ah'm talkin' away aboot maself, an' payin' no heed to aught else. What's wrong wi' ye?'

'Well, as you will have to know sooner or later, there's no use making a secret of it; Sartwell has discharged me.'

'No!' cried Braunt, incredulously, stopping short and turning to his friend.

'Yes, he has.'

'In God's name, what for?'

'No reason was given. The cashier handed me a month's wages and told me to go. I gave back three-fourths of it, for I'm entitled to but a week's notice. I'll have no favour from Sartwell.'

'Ah, lad, there ye were foolish. Niver give back money when ye've once got yere fingers on it. Ye hurt yereself an' not the others. Still, Ah'd very likely ha' done the same thing; but then, Ah'm a fool, an' not to be taken pattern by. Have ye asked Sartwell the reason?'

'I have not seen him, nor will I.'

'Wrong again, lad. Let's go back now, an' have it out wi' him before he goes whoam.'

'No, no, I refuse to see him.'

'Then Ah'll see him. A thing like that mustn't be. Discharged for no cause! Niver! Ah've brought back the men, an' Ah can bring them oot again. Ah will, too, before Ah'll let injustice like this happen!'

'What good would that do? The men are helpless, as you know; besides, they wouldn't come out, and, if they thought of doing so, I would myself beg of them to stay in their places. No, the proper thing now is to keep quiet; work hard; fill up the empty treasury; organize the trade—not locally, but universally; and see, when the next strike comes on, that we are not led by a fool like Gibbons.'

'But, lad, don't ye want to find out why ye're paid off? It's rank injustice, but there must be some reason for't in Sartwell's mind. Ye've like said some foolish thing that's been misrepresented to him, an' Ah'm sure Ah can put it straight. Ah didn't think Sartwell was the man t' listen t' any jabber that was brought t' him, but one can niver tell.'

'You're quite right about Sartwell. He wouldn't pay attention to talk that came to him, no matter what the talk was. No, it's deeper than that. He knows my opinions about the proper organization of the men, but that wouldn't influence him for a moment. Because I said no reasons were given, you mustn't think I don't know why he turned me adrift. I do, but it's not a subject I care to talk about, even with you, Mr. Braunt. Only I should like you to understand that interference will do no good. I should like to drop out quietly and have nothing said. Remember that I, knowing all the circumstances, am not sure but that, were I in his place, I should have acted exactly as Sartwell has done. I'm not going to have this made into a grievance, for I don't want it talked about. The main fact to know is that Sartwell and I are enemies, and there can be no peace between us until one or other is defeated. If you could talk Sartwell into asking me to come back—and you know the difficulty there would be in that—I wouldn't go back. So you understand the uselessness of seeing Mr. Sartwell.'

'But, lad, how are ye t' live?'

Marston laughed.

'Oh, I'll have no difficulty in making a living. Don't you fear. I'll stick by the Union too, and some day I hope to show Sartwell how a strike should be conducted.'

'Right ye are, if that's the game!' cried Braunt, bringing his hand down on the other's shoulder. 'Ah don't believe mooch in strikes, but Ah believe in ye! Ah'll see the men to-night, an' Ah'll have ye made secretary to th' Union. That will be oor answer ta Sartwell. Then, lad, ye can have enooph to live on, and ye can put the pieces o' th' Union together ta suit ye.'

'I should like that,' said Marston, eagerly.

'It shall be doon. The men will go in for it when

they hear ye've got the sack. They still feel sore over the defeat, as if it wasn't all their own fault; and now their fear of Sartwell's packing some o' them off is over, they'll like to show a little independence by electing ye, to prove to the manager that they're not afraid, which they are. Ah'll have to convince them that Sartwell won't strike back or tak your appointment as a defiance.'

'But perhaps he will.'

'Not him. He was as sick o' the strike as any one. No. He'll shrug his shoulders, but he'll say nothing. Ah'm certain if Gibbons had had the sense to go to the masters at the first, he would have broken Sartwell long since. An' that was what Sartwell was afraid of, Ah'll be bound. His greatest stroke was getting Monkton and Hope out of the country. It was your visit to Hope did that. Sartwell saw ye'd put your finger on the weak spot; an' Ah'll warrant, if we knew the ins and outs of it, Sartwell threatened ta choock up the whole business if they didn't leave, and they left. Ah! he's a man as can fight, is Sartwell.'

They had reached the court shortly before their conversation had arrived at this point, and entering Braunt's apartment, Marston sat down with his host. The room was barer than such places usually are, for every pawnable or saleable thing had been removed from time to time as the siege went on. The empty space where the old harmonium had stood made the room seem larger than it really was.

'Yes,' said Braunt with a sigh, noticing Marston's eye wandering to the vacant spot, 'it was the last thing that went before Jessie died. We pawned it, thinking we'd get it back again, but Ah'll niver tak it back. Ah'm glad it's gone. Ah couldn't bear to look at it. But let's not talk of what's away, but o' what's here. Ye're still thinkin' ye can do somethin' for the workin'-man by organization?'

'I'm sure of it.'

Braunt shook his head.

'Ye won't, my lad, but Ah'll do my best to get ye the chance ta try. Just look at what has happened. They let Gibbons go wi'oot a word: he was a fool, perhaps, but he worked hard for them, an' they doan't even say thankee. An' they'll do the same wi' ye. They'll do the same wi' any one.'

'It all depends on how they are led. When men are foolishly led, they soon find it out and lose confidence. Think what a man like Napoleon might have accomplished if he had led working-men instead of soldiers, and had turned his talents to bettering his fellow-men instead of butchering them!'

'Napoleon could have done nothin'. He could have done nothin' wi' soldiers, even, if it had not been for one power which ye can niver have.'

'What is that?'

'The power o' orderin' a man out o' the ranks, an' havin' him shot. If Ah'd that power Ah'd lead the men maself, an' get them anythin' they wanted. The State will let you starve a hundred men slowly to death and niver interfere, but if ye shot even Gibbons there'd be a row about it. An' yet we think we're civilized! Ah say we're savages.'

'Oh, that's wrong, Braunt!' cried Marston, rising. 'We're long past that stage. If I get the reorganizing of the Union, I'll try a fall with Sartwell some day, and will down him without shooting anybody.'

'Very well, lad; Ah'll do ma best for ye, an' wish ye luck.'

Braunt did his best, and the next week Marston was unanimously made secretary of the Union by men who had looked upon him as a traitor only a few weeks before.

CHAPTER XXII

MARSTON made no move to communicate with Sartwell. If the manager expected the young man to propose a compromise, he was disappointed; and when he heard that Marston had been elected secretary of the Union, he smiled grimly, but made no comment. It was to be war to the knife, and Sartwell always admired an able antagonist. He made no motion against the Union, although at that time he could probably have forced seventy-five per cent. of the men to withdraw from it, had he been so minded. Marston gave him due credit for declining to use the weapon of coercion, knowing Sartwell too well to believe that the thought had not occurred to him. Yet there was little of the spirit of Christian forgiveness about the manager, as his wife had with truth often pointed out to him: he pursued an enemy to the bitter end. Gibbons metaphorically prostrated himself before Sartwell, and begged for the place in the Works from which Marston had been ejected. He was starving, he said. Sartwell replied that he was glad to hear it, and hoped Gibbons would now appreciate the sufferings of the men he had so jauntily led astray; so Gibbons had again humiliated himself for nothing.

To do Sartwell justice, however, it must be admitted that the attempted management of Marston

had slipped out of his hands in a way he had never anticipated. He did not dislike the young man; in truth, rather the opposite: still, he had higher ambitions for his only daughter than to see her marry one of his own workmen. The incident of finding Marston with Edna in the garden had disturbed him more than he cared to admit, even to himself. If this persistent young fellow managed, when half starved, in the turmoil of the strike, to attend so successfully to his love affair, what might not happen when he was at peace with the world and had money in his pocket? Sartwell could have forbidden his daughter to see Marston, and doubtless she would have obeyed; but he was loth to pique her curiosity regarding the reason for such prohibition, and he could not baldly tell her that the young man had craved permission to pay his addresses to her: such an announcement might set her fancy afire, with disastrous results to her father's hopes. Sartwell only half expected Marston would appeal to him against his discharge; but he knew that before the young fellow got another situation he must refer his new masters to his old manager, and, when that time came, or if Marston made a move on his own account, Sartwell stood ready to make terms with him. If Marston promised not to see the girl for two years, the manager would reinstate him, or would help him to secure another place.

All these plans went to pieces when the men unexpectedly chose Marston as secretary of their Union. It was a contingency the manager had not counted upon, but he faced the new position of affairs without a murmur against fate.

Marston thought his dismissal harsh and unjust, but he felt that it freed him from all consideration towards Sartwell. He now determined to meet the girl whenever and wherever he could; so, with this purpose strong in his heart, he went to Wimbledon, boldly

presented himself at the front door, and asked to see Miss Sartwell. He knew her father did not dare tell her the true state of the case, and, if it came to that, permission to visit the house had already been given in Edna's own presence—a permission which her father had probably not withdrawn when Marston left them together in the garden, as such withdrawal might necessitate explanations which Sartwell would not believe it wise to make. Therefore, the young man resolved to see the girl, tell her frankly why he came, and plead his cause with her. Even if she refused to listen to him, he would at least cause her to think of him, and that of itself was worth risking something for.

The servant, on opening the door, recognized Marston as the young man who on a former occasion did not know his own mind, and she promptly said to him—

'Mr. Sartwell is not at home.'

'I wish to see Miss Sartwell.'

'The young lady is not at home either.'

'Will she return soon?'

'I don't know. Miss Edna's gone away.'

'Gone away?' echoed Marston, visibly perturbed at this unexpected check in his advance.

The servant saw she was face to face with another case of mental indecision; so she promptly grappled with the situation by calling Mrs. Sartwell, who was in the dining-room: then, turning the embarrassed young man over to her mistress, she closed the door and returned to the more important work which Marston's knock had interrupted.

'You wished to see Miss Sartwell?' began the lady, icily. 'Why?'

It was not an easy question to answer, when asked suddenly by an utter stranger.

'Well, I can scarcely tell you, Mrs. Sartwell,' stammered the young man, extremely ill at ease.

'It is entirely a personal matter. I wished to have a few words with Miss Sartwell; that is all.'

The lady sat bolt upright, with a look of great severity on her face. There was mystery here which she resolved to fathom before she allowed the unfortunate young man to depart. He speedily came to the conclusion that he had in the lady before him an implacable enemy, more to be feared, perhaps, than Sartwell himself. Each question shot at him led him deeper and deeper into the tangle.

'You are her lover, I suppose?'

'No. That is—I really can't explain, Mrs. Sartwell.'

'Very well; I shall ask my husband when he returns to-night. He knows nothing of this, of course?'

'Yes, he does.'

'He knows you are here?'

'He doesn't know I am here to-day. He knows I love his daughter.'

'I thought you said you were not her lover. Young man, whatever else you do, speak the truth. All our earthly troubles come from shunning the truth, and from overweening pride. Avoid pride, and avoid falsehood. What did you mean when you told me just now that you were not Miss Sartwell's lover? I beseech you to speak the truth.'

'I'm trying to, but you see it is rather difficult to talk about this with a third person, and——'

'I am not a third person. I am her step-mother, and responsible to a Higher Power for what I do regarding Edna. I must have full knowledge, and then trust to the guiding light from Above. We are ever prone to err when we rely on our own puny efforts. Does Edna Sartwell know you love her?'

'No.'

'And her father does?'

'Yes. I told him.'

'Then I wonder he did not forbid you to see her.'

'He did.'

'Are you one of his workmen?'

'Yes. At least I was.'

'Are you not now?'

'No.'

'He has discharged you?'

'I have been discharged.'

The stern look faded from Mrs. Sartwell's face. She drew a deep breath—a prolonged 'Ah!' with what might be taken as a quiver of profound satisfaction in it—and, for the first time during the conference, leaned back comfortably in her chair.

'Poor young man!' she said at last, gazing compassionately at him. 'Do you mean to say, then, that you would risk your whole future for a girl to whom you have never spoken?'

'Oh, I have spoken with her, Mrs. Sartwell. I said I had never spoken about—that she doesn't know I care anything for her.'

'But you know absolutely nothing about her disposition—her temper.'

'I'd chance it.'

Mrs. Sartwell shook her head mournfully.

'How well you reflect the spirit of this scoffing age! People chance everything. Nothing is so important to a man as the solemn, prayerful choice of a wife, for on that choice rests the misery or the happiness of this life. A woman's great duty—at least it seems so to my poor judgement—is to bring light, comfort, and joy to her husband's home. Do you think Edna Sartwell is fitted by temperament or education for this noble task?'

'She'd make me happy, if that's what you mean.'

'How little, how little you know her! But then, you know her father, and she's very like him. Of course, he will never permit you to marry her, if he

can prevent it. You are a working-man, and he has no thought or sympathy for those from whose ranks he sprang. He has higher ideas for his daughter; I have long seen that. It is pride, pride, pride! Oh, it will have a terrible fall some day, and perhaps you, poor lad, who talk of chance, are the humble instrument selected by an overruling Providence to bring about the humbling of his pride, without which none of us can enter the Kingdom! I see it all now. I see why he sent Edna to college at Eastbourne, although he said it was because we could not get on together. How little prevarication avails! The deceiver shall himself be deceived! In your seemingly chance meeting with me I see the Hand pointing towards truth. Still,' continued Mrs. Sartwell reflectively, as though speaking more to herself than to her hearer, 'there is no doubt that, if you took Edna's fancy, she would marry you in spite of her father or any one else. I have long warned her father that such a time is coming; but alas! my words are unheeded in this house, and the time has come sooner than I expected. I have wondered for some weeks past what was in Edna's mind. I thought that perhaps she was thinking of Barnard Hope, but I see now I was mistaken. No, she was very likely thinking of you, and her father, discovering it, has packed her off to High Cliff College at Eastbourne, where he probably hopes you cannot visit her. She is a wayward, obstinate child; impulsive, and difficult to manage. She thinks her father is perfection, so you may form your own opinion of how defective her judgement is. Yes, I should not be at all surprised if, when you tell her you love her, she would at once propose to run away with you. Nothing Edna Sartwell would do or say could surprise me.'

Marston, who had been very uneasy while a forced listener to this exposition of the girl's character, now rose abruptly, and said he must leave; he had already

taken up too much of Mrs. Sartwell's time, he murmured.

'Our time is given us,' replied the good woman, also rising, 'to make the best use of; and if we remember that we must give an account of every moment allotted to us, we will not count that time ill-spent which is devoted to the welfare of others. I sincerely trust that what I have said will sink deeply into your mind, and that you will profit by it.'

'I shall not fail to do so.'

'You will understand why I cannot give you any information about Miss Sartwell, or arrange for any meeting between you. It would not be right. If she were now in the house, I could not permit you to see her, since I know you come without her father's permission. I hope you do not think me harsh in saying this.'

'Oh, not at all.'

'And whatever comes of your infatuation for her, will you do me the justice to remember that my last words to you were to implore you to cast all thought of her from your mind?'

'I shall remember it,' said Marston.

'If you attempt to meet her, you know you will be doing so against my strict wish and command.'

'You certainly will not be to blame for anything that happens, Mrs. Sartwell.'

'Ah, if I could only be sure of that!' said the patient woman, mournfully shaking her head. 'But blame is so easily bestowed, and it shifts responsibility from shoulders certainly more fitted to bear it, and perhaps more deserving. It is only a few days since Mr. Barnard Hope came here, and was surprised to find Edna gone. He told me he came to see me, but he could not help noticing how still and peaceful the house was. When he asked where Edna was, I replied to him as I reply to you. Her father is the proper person to answer that question. Yet

Mr. Hope is the son of my best friend, a noble woman, whose benefactions shower blessings far and near. Well, good-bye, and I'm sorry not to be able to assist you; but I shall remember you in my petitions, and will trust that your feet may be guided aright.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Sartwell, and good-bye.'

As the young man walked away he kept repeating to himself, 'High Cliff College, Eastbourne.' Not that he was likely to forget it; for what lover, since the world began, ever forgot the name of the residence of his beloved?

CHAPTER XXIII

On reaching the railway station Marston's first regret was that he had not taken all the money offered to him on the day of his discharge. He had no idea that his quest would lead him to a fashionable and expensive sea-side resort. Prudence suggested to him that he should defer his visit to Eastbourne until he had more money; but, he said to himself, if he did not go at once, Sartwell would be certain to learn from his wife of the visit to Wimbledon, and there might be increased difficulties in getting to see Edna at Eastbourne. As it was, he had no idea how the meeting he desired was to be brought about; for doubtless Sartwell, when sending his daughter to the College, had given the lady into whose care Edna was entrusted, a hint of his object in placing her there. Marston stepped out of the South-Western carriage at Clapham Junction, and found he had but half an hour to wait for the Eastbourne train. He smiled when he remembered the care and thought he was giving to the Union, after having so frequently asserted that he was willing to devote his life to the work. It was a blessing that all the Union needed at the moment was to be let alone.

When he arrived at Eastbourne, he immediately set out in search of High Cliff College, thinking it well to reconnoitre the situation, hoping the sight of it

might suggest some plan which was practicable. He would have one thing in his favour, which was that Sartwell could not have warned his daughter against seeing him, fearing to arouse her curiosity or suspicions. If, then, he got one word with Edna alone, he had no fear but that he could arrange for a longer interview. He found High Cliff to be a large house, situated in extensive grounds, with a view of the sea, but with a wall that was not less discouraging than the glass-topped barrier at Wimbledon.

Marston saw there was going to be more difficulty in getting an interview with his sweetheart than he had at first imagined. He thought for a moment of applying boldly at the front door for permission to see the young student, but quickly dismissed the plan as impracticable. He was certain that a shrewd man like Sartwell would have more foresight than to make arrangements so badly that the first person who called to see his daughter would be admitted, even if the ordinary rules of the college allowed of such a thing—which was most improbable. He realized that the place was not to be taken by assault, but rather by slow and patient siege; so, wandering down by the shore, he sat on the shingle, within sound of the soothing waves, and gave his whole attention to the problem.

If a man whose ambition was to emancipate the worker, and change the whole relationship between capital and labour, found himself baffled in seeking half an hour's talk with a young girl, not immured in a prison or a foreign convent, but merely residing in an ordinary English College for Young Ladies, then indeed were his chances of solving the larger question remote and shadowy. Thus he came to bind the two enterprises together, saying to himself that success with the one would indicate success with the other. The first thing to do, then, was to secure some cheap lodging—if such a place was to be found

in this fashionable resort—and so hoard his money and bide his time, for he was convinced he would make haste only by going slowly. It was a case in which undue precipitancy would make ultimate victory impossible. He knew that some time during the day the pupils would go out for a walk, though guarded, doubtless, by vigilant governesses. It might be possible to pass this interesting procession, and, while doing so, to slip a note into Edna's hand; but even as Marston thought of this plan, he dismissed it as unworkable, for Edna would be so surprised at such an inexplicable proceeding on his part that she would not have the presence of mind necessary to conceal the missive promptly enough to escape detection. He left the shore, still ruminating on the problem, and, searching in the back part of the town, found lodgings which suited his requirements and his purse. When this was done, he strolled on the promenade, still giving the absorbing enigma his whole attention.

Suddenly he received a staggering blow on the back which almost thrust him forward on his face. Recovering himself, he turned round breathless, alarmed and angry, to see before him the huge form and smiling face of Barney Hope, who genially presented the hand that had smitten him.

'Hello, old fellow!' cried Barney, laughing aloud at the other's resentful glare. 'What are you doing down here? Has the strike taken it out of you so that you had to have sea air to recuperate?'

'No strike ever took it out of me like the blow you struck just now.'

Barney threw back his head and roared; then, linking arms with Marston in the most friendly manner, he said—

'No, my paw isn't light, as all my friends say, and it has got me into trouble before now. I had to thrash a fellow in Paris once, merely because I could not convince him that the gentle tap I gave him was

in fun. He admitted afterwards that there was a difference, and that he would rather have my open palm on his back than my closed fist in his face—but what can you expect? The French have no sense of humour, and yet they can't box well. It should occur to them, as a nation, that they ought either to know how to take a joke, or else how to double up their fists if they are going to look upon things seriously. But my slap on the back is nothing to my hand-shake when I'm feeling cordial towards a fellow-creature. Let's see, have we shaken hands this go?'

'Yes, thanks,' said Marston, with such eagerness that the other laughed again.

'Well, I'm delighted to meet you so unexpectedly, don't you know. Your name's Langton, if I remember rightly?'

'My name is Marston.'

'Oh, yes, of course. I'm the stupidest fool in the kingdom about names, and it's an awfully bad failing. People seem to get offended if you can't remember their names. I'm sure I can't tell why. I wouldn't care tuppence what I was called, so long as you don't say I'm no painter; then I'm ready to fight. A man who won't fight for his art oughtn't to have an art. And, talking about art, I remember now that Langton was the fellow you sent me who can play the piano as if he were a Rubinhoff—that Russian player, don't you know. Well, I'm thundering glad to see you; I was just hoping to meet some fellow I knew. I'm dying for some one to talk to. It's a beastly dull hole, Eastbourne, don't you know.'

'I was never here before. It seems to me a very nice place.'

'Yes, it looks that way at first, but wait till you've been here a day or two. It's so wretchedly respectable!—that's what I object to in it. Respectability's bad enough on its native heath, but sea air seems to

accentuate it, don't you know. I can't tell you why this is, but it's so; and respectability that you can put up with in London becomes unbearable down by the sea. Haven't you noticed that? And it's all on such a slender basis too: the third-class fare to Brighton is four shillings and tuppence-ha'penny, while to Eastbourne its four shillings and elevenpence, so all this swagger is on a beggarly foundation of eightpence-ha'penny. You see what I mean? I wouldn't give a week in Brighton for a day in Eastbourne, although I should hate to be condemned to either, for that matter. London is the only town that's exactly my size, don't you know.'

'Then why do you stop at Eastbourne?'

'Ah, now you come to the point; now you place your finger right on the spot. Why, indeed? Can't you guess? I can tell in a moment why you are here.'

'Why?' asked Marston, in some alarm.

'Oh, simply because some fool of a doctor, who didn't know any better, sent you down. You're here for the air, my boy: you don't come for the society, so it must be the air—that's the only other thing Eastbourne's got. You were told it would brace you up in a week, and it will, if your reason holds out for so long. I'd be a madman, sane as I am, if I were compelled to live in this place a fortnight; I would, on my honour! No, you don't catch me in Eastbourne for either air or the society, and yet, in a way, it is the society, too, only it doesn't seem to come off; and here I am stranded, don't you know, with a coachman and a groom, not to mention a valet, two horses, and one of the smartest carts that ever left London. That's my turn-out, there. I drive tandem, of course; it's the only Christian way to drive. Not that I care about the style of it—I hope I'm above all that sort of thing—and I'm not to be blamed because so many other fellows do it, don't

you know; I love tandem for itself alone. Ever drive tandem?'

'I never did,' said Marston, looking at Barney's handsome equipage, which was being slowly driven up and down the road by a man in livery. He had noticed it before, but now he gazed at it with renewed interest, as Barney modestly proclaimed himself the owner.

'Well, it isn't as easy as it looks. It's not every fool can drive a tandem, although I am said to be one of the first tandem-drivers in London, don't you know. *I* don't say so, of course; but there are those who do, and they are judges, too. But it's no fun driving about alone: to enjoy tandem-driving you need to have a pretty girl beside you.'

'And are there no pretty girls in Eastbourne?'

'There are, my boy; and that's just what I want to talk with you about. Let's sit down here in this shelter, because I want your whole attention. Now, I did you a favour one day, even though it was for another fellow, didn't I?'

'Yes. You have done me at least two favours.'

'Well, that's all right. I may be able to do you a third or a fourth—who knows?—and I mention it because I'm about to ask you to do me a great one now. That's what made me so glad to see you, don't you know; as well, of course, as the pleasure of talking with you again, in this dismal hole. I was just thinking about it, and wondering whom I could get, when I looked up, and there you were. Providence always helps me when I'm in a pinch—always, don't you know. I never knew it to fail, and yet I'm not what you'd call a devout man myself. You've got nothing particular to do down here, I suppose?'

'Nothing but look after my own pleasure.'

'Quite so. And, as there isn't any pleasure to be had here, you may just as well turn round and help a fellow-creature; besides, it will be a great lark. You

see, I want a man of intelligence, and I don't suppose one is to be found in Eastbourne—for if he was intelligent he wouldn't stay. Then, too, he must be a man not known in the town—you see what I mean? Also, he must know something about the labouring classes and their ways; so you see, my boy, Providence has sent the very man I want, don't you know. Now promise that you will help me.'

'If I can, I will.'

'Right you are! You're just the individual who can, and no one else can do it half so well. Now, in the first place, have you ever seen Sartwell's daughter? He's only got one.'

'Have I ever seen her?'

'Yes. She was at my reception the day you were there. I don't suppose you noticed her among so many; but she was the handsomest girl in the room, far and away.'

'Yes, I have seen Miss Sartwell. She used to call for her father at his office quite frequently.'

'Good again! That's a fourth qualification needed by the person who is to help me, so you see you are the man of all men for this job. Now it happens that this charming girl is at college in Eastbourne, which is, in a word, the reason I am here. I want to get a message taken to Miss Sartwell at the college, and I want you to take it.'

'Oh, I don't think I should care to go on a mission of that sort, Mr. Hope. If Mr. Sartwell were to find out that I——'

'My dear fellow,' interrupted Barney, placing his hand confidentially on Marston's shoulder, 'it's all right, I assure you. There is really nothing surreptitious about it. Heavens and earth, Langton, you don't think I'm that kind of a man, I trust! Oh no! I've the parental consent all right enough.'

'Then why don't you go to the college and see her?'

'Because, dear boy, the case is just a trifle complicated, don't you know. I can always get the parental consent; that's the money, you know. As a general thing the girls like me, and I won't say the money has all to do with that: no, I flatter myself, personal attractions, a fair amount of brains, and a certain artistic reputation come in there; but money tells with the older people. Now, Sartwell and I understand each other. Not to put too fine a point upon it, you know, he says practically: "Barney, you're an ass, but you're rich, and I don't suppose you're a bigger fool than the average young man of the present day, so I give you a fair field; go in, my boy, and win." I say to Sartwell: "You're a grumpy old curmudgeon, with no more artistic perception than the Shot Tower; but your daughter is an angel, and I've got money enough for the two of us." You see, I never did care for money except to get what I want. So there we stand. Sartwell was coming down here with me; but, after I started, he telegraphed to my studio that there was so much to do in the shops, with all the men newly back, that he would like me to postpone my visit for a week. Well, I had to get the horses and trap down here; so I drove, and I left London a day earlier than I expected to. Hence the present complication. I called at the school, asked to see Miss Sartwell, saying I was a friend of her father's; but the lady in charge looked on me with suspicion—she did indeed, my boy, difficult to believe as the statement is. The lady said she could not allow Miss Sartwell to see any person unless that person was accompanied by her father. She would take no message to the girl—and there I was. I wrote to Miss Sartwell from my hotel here, but the letter was opened by the dragon, who returned it to me, asking me not to attempt to communicate with any of the young ladies under her charge. So here is this stylish

tandem, and there is that lovely girl, while I am wasting in the desert air, longing to take her out for a drive. That's the situation in a nut-shell, don't you know, and I want you to help me by taking a message to Miss Edna.'

'I don't see how I can do it. If you, with her father's permission, could not get a word with her, how can I hope to?'

'Oh, I have that all arranged. I thought first of getting some young man in as a carpenter or plumber; but, so far as I can learn, the pipes and the woodwork of the school are all right. Then an inspiration came to me—I am subject to inspirations. The man who looks after the garden lives in the town, and he is quite willing to assist me; in fact I have made it worth his while, don't you know. The trouble is that all his assistants are rather clodhoppers, and would be sure to bungle a diplomatic affair like this; however, I was going to chance it with one to-morrow, when I saw you, and said to myself, "Here is the very man!" When Providence sends the right man, I always recognize him. That is the whole secret of a successful life, don't you know—to be able to recognize the gifts Providence sends at the moment they are sent. Where most people go wrong, don't you know, is by not appreciating the providential interposition until afterwards. You will put on a gardener's smock, take a clumsy and unwieldy broom in your hand, and go to High Cliff College to sweep the walks, and that sort of thing, don't you know. Then, as the girls are walking about, seize the psychological moment and tell Miss Edna I am waiting down here with the tandem. The young ladies are allowed to walk out three at a time. Two of them can sit back to back with us, and Edna will sit with me. Tell her to choose two friends whom she can trust, and we will all go for a jolly drive together. If she hesitates, tell her I am down here with her father's permission, but don't say

that unless as a last resort. I would much rather have her come of her own accord, don't you know.'

'What I fail to understand about your plan is why—if you really have Mr. Sartwell's permission—no, no, I'm not doubting your word—I should have put it, as you have her father's permission—why do you not telegraph him, saying you are here, and get him to send a wire to the mistress of the college, asking her to allow Miss Sartwell to go with you for a drive, with a proper chaperon, of course?'

'My dear Langton——'

'Marston, if you please.'

'Oh, yes, of course. My dear Marston, what you suggest is delightfully simple, and is precisely what would present itself to the well-regulated mind. It would be the sane thing to do, and would be so charmingly proper. But you see, Marston, my boy, I understand a thing or two about women, which you may not yet have had experience enough to learn. I don't want too much parental sanction about this affair, because a young girl delights in an innocent little escapade on her own account—don't you see what I mean? Of course, if the villain of the piece is baffled, he will ultimately appeal to the proper authority; but you know I have already seen a good deal of the young lady under the parental wing—if I may so state the fact; and although she is pleasant enough, and all that, I don't seem to be making as much progress with her as I would like, don't you know. Now, a little flavour of—well, you understand what I mean—thingumbob—you know—romance, and that sort of thing, is worth all the cut-and-dried "Bless-you-my-children" in the market. You'll know all about that, as you grow older, my boy.'

'Mr. Hope——'

'Look here, my boy, call me Barney. Few of my friends say "Mr. Hope"; and when any one does say it, I always think he is referring to my father, who

is at this moment giddily enjoying his precious self at Dresden, or thereabouts. You were about to say——'

'I was about to say I would very much like to oblige you, but I have scruples about doing what you ask of me.'

'Marston—you'll forgive me, won't you?—but I'm afraid you're very much like the rest of the world. Fellows always want to oblige you, but they don't want to do the particular obligement that you happen to want—if I make myself clear. If you want to borrow a fiver, they will do any mortal thing you wish but lend it. Now it happens that, so far from wanting a fiver, I'll give you one—or a ten-pound note, for that matter—if you will do this, don't you know.'

'Oh, if I did it at all, I wouldn't take money for doing it.'

'But I don't want a fellow to work for love, don't you know. I don't believe in that. If I sell a picture, I want my money for it—yes, by Jove, I do!'

'If I did this, it would be entirely for love, and for no other consideration. But I don't think I would be acting fairly and honourably if I did it. I can't explain to you why I think this; my whole wish is to do what you ask me, and yet I feel sure, if I were thoroughly honest, as I would like to be, I should at once say "No."'

'My dear fellow, I honour your scruples; but I assure you they are misplaced in this instance. They are, really. Besides, I have your promise, and I'm going to hold you to it. It isn't as though I were going to run away with the girl, and marry her against her own wish and the wishes of her combined relatives. If I wanted to see the girl against her father's will, well, then there might be something to urge in opposition to my project; but I don't—and don't you see that fact makes all the difference in the world? Of course

you do. Why, a man ought to do anything for the girl he loves, and he's a poltroon if he doesn't. That's why I'm taking all this trouble and staying in this town of the forlorn. If a girl doesn't find you taking some little trouble in order to see her, why, she is not going to think very much or very often about you; take my word for that.'

'I believe you are right. I'll go.'

'You're a brick, Marston! yes, my boy, a brick!' cried Barney, enthusiastically, slapping his comrade on the shoulder.

'A brick of very common clay, I'm afraid, Mr. Hope. I suppose you believe in the saying, "All's fair in love"?'

'Of course I do, dear boy; it is the maxim on which I regulate my daily life.'

'Very well. I will not take a verbal message, for I may not have an opportunity to deliver it; besides, I might forget something, or give it a misleading twist. If you will write exactly what you want Miss Sartwell to know, and give it to me in a sealed envelope, I will deliver it if there is the slightest chance of my doing so.'

'Right you are, old man! Now come with me, and I'll introduce you to the gardener person, and see if he has a smock that will mis-fit you.'

CHAPTER XXIV

In the morning Barney took Marston to the house of the friendly gardener, whose good will had been secured through the corrupting influences of wealth; and there the young man donned the smock-frock which was supposed to give him that horticultural air necessary for the part he had to play. Marston was very serious about it; but Barney seemed to enjoy the masquerade to the utmost, and wanted to take the amateur gardener to be photographed, so that there might be a picture as a memento of the occasion.

At last Marston got away, with the broom on his shoulder, and, presenting himself at High Cliff grounds, was admitted without question. He made no attempt to conceal from himself the fact that he did not like the fraud he was about to practise; but when his conscience upbraided him, he asked of it what better plan it had to propose, and to this there was no reply.

The grounds were empty when he reached them, and with his natural shrewdness he applied himself first to the walks which were in public view; so that, when the young girls came out, he might be in the more secluded portion of the plantation, where he was sure the rules of the college would require them to take the air. His surmise proved correct, and the

young man felt more embarrassed than he had even suspected he would be, when he suddenly found himself in the midst of a fluttering bevy of girls, all chattering, but happily none paying the least attention to him. He had not counted on the presence of any of the teachers; but three of them were there, who, however, sat on a garden-seat, and did not seem overburdened with anxiety about the pupils under their care.

Edna Sartwell had a book in her hand, with a finger between the pages, but she walked up and down with another girl, talking in a low tone. Marston hoped the book was an interesting one, and wished the girl would go into some secluded corner to read it; for he began to see that his enterprise was not going to be so easy of accomplishment as he expected, even though he had gained admittance to the grounds, which at first had seemed the most difficult move in the game. The book at last gave him the opportunity he sought: Edna and her companion stood together for a moment after their walk, then each went her separate way.

In a corner of the grounds was a secluded summer-house, screened from the view of the school by a wilderness of trees and shrubs, almost out of hearing of the lively chatter which made the air merry elsewhere; and to this quiet spot Edna betook herself, reading the book as she walked, for the paths thither were evidently familiar to her. Marston followed, slowly at first, then more quickly as the chances of observation lessened, his heart beating faster than the exertion he was making warranted. The girl was seated in the little châlet when Marston's figure darkened the entrance.

'Miss Sartwell,' was all he could say.

Edna sprang to her feet, letting the book fall to the floor, and looked at him with startled eyes which had no recognition in them.

'I see you don't know me, and no wonder; for

I did not wear gardeners' clothes when I stood last in your garden.'

A bright flush of pleasure overspread the girl's face, and laughter came first to her eyes, then to her lips.

'How you frightened me!' she said, seeming anything but frightened, and quite unable to restrain her merriment, as her glance flashed up and down his uncouth apparel. 'Have you become gardener here, then, or did you come over the wall?'

'The walls here are too high, or I might have attempted them. I am gardener for the day only, and merely to get a word with you.'

'With me? I thought the strike had happily ended. Haven't you gone back to work? How did you get away?'

'Oh, there was no difficulty about that! I can always get a day off when I want it. Yes, I went back to work and have been busy ever since. I came here yesterday in the hope of seeing you. It was very important—for me, at least.'

'Has the desired promotion come so soon, then, or do you think I must speak to my father about your position when I next see him? I expected him here before this, but he writes that there is so much to be done, now the men are back, that he will be unable to come for perhaps a week or more.'

'I have not come here to beg for your father's favour, but for yours. I love you, Edna, and I have loved you ever since I first saw you! Don't imagine I am so—so conceited—that I have even a hope that you—you—care for me, for of course you don't and can't; but I wanted you to know. I wanted to tell you, and that is why I am here. I am poor—I don't deny that—but your father was also poor once, and he has got on in the world. I will get on; I will work night and day. Whoever my master is, I will serve him faithfully—my God! I will serve him on my

knees, if that will convince him of my earnestness to win confidence and a place of trust—and all the time cheerfully and hopefully, with your picture in my mind, as it has been in my mind—for so long—from the first. You see, I have no chance to win you as another might. You are in this place for the very purpose of keeping me from meeting you as I might meet you if I were rich. I have no fair chance—none at all, except what I steal for myself, as I have done to-day. It means so much to me—everything!—that I did not dare to take the risk. I know I have spoken too soon—too abruptly—but I dared not set my face at what is before me unless you knew. Some one might win you while I was working for you—there will be plenty to try. I don't want you to say a word—I want neither hope nor discouragement—no promise—nothing! You know, and that is enough for me now. But I would like you to remember—sometimes—that there is no man striving as I shall strive. Think of that—when others speak. My darling—my darling—no man ever felt as I feel, since the beginning of the world!'

Whatever diffidence Marston had hitherto experienced in Edna's presence, melted when he began to speak, in the fervent heat of his passion. The words rushed forth, each following those gone before, in jumbled, breathless procession; his face was aflame, and his nether lip trembled when he ceased. At first he seemed to be running a race against Time—for interruption might come at any moment; but he soon forgot his competitor, and, so far as he was concerned, no one existed in the world but himself and the trembling, confused girl before him.

She, after her first look of amazed incredulity, felt backward with her hand for the support of the wall; and then gradually sank upon the seat, an expression, partly of fear, overspreading her now colourless face. As Marston went impetuously on, her head drooped

upon her hands, and thus she remained while he spoke.

A pause ensued, so deep and silent, that Marston, as he leaned his hand against the door-post, afraid to move forward or to retreat, could hear distant girlish laughter, free from any consciousness of problems other than those of the schoolroom. He knew that he should remember every trivial detail of the place all his life—the broom which lay at his feet; the book which had fallen open-leaved upon the floor; even the title glittering in gold on the side, which conveyed no meaning to his mind except one word that caught his attention—'Courtship' ('The Courtship of Miles Standish' was the whole phrase), and he wondered vaguely if the courtship had prospered. Rapidly as his wondering eyes gathered up the accessories of the scene, they always returned to the bowed and silent figure before him; and something in the outlines of her drooping shoulders told him intuitively of a change—elusive, but real. His mind had been too much occupied with the hard realities of life to indulge in speculative analysis of any sort; but now it was uplifted, touched by the magic wand of love, and endowed with a subtle perception unknown to him before. He saw that the girl, who, as a child, had welcomed him, would, as a woman, bid him farewell.

At last she slowly shook her head.

'It cannot be—it cannot be!' she murmured.

'Not now. I know that—I don't ask that!' he cried, eagerly. 'But—some time—some time?'

The girl did not look up.

'It can never be—never!' she said.

'All I want is a chance—a fair chance. Don't—oh, please don't say "No" or "Yes" now! Your father is prejudiced against me, I know; not against me personally, I think, but because I am poor; it is only another expression of his great love for you.

He knows what poverty is, and he wants to shield you from it. He is right, and if I am as poor two years from now, or four years, I shall not ask——'

'Does my father know?'

'Yes. I told him that night—the night you first spoke to me. That is why he is angry.'

'Then that is why you—that is the reason—when you were in the garden——'

'Yes, that is why I was afraid to have him find me there.'

Again there was a long silence between them. The thoughts of the girl ranged back over her past life, from the time her father forbade her to come to the office until the present moment, flashing like a search-light upon events hitherto misunderstood, making them stand out in their true proportions. All her father's actions—all his words—had to be reconsidered. She now saw in former phrases meanings which had been hidden from her: she had now the key that unlocked the room illumined by knowledge; and although her heart yearned towards her father, sympathizing with him when confronted by an unexpected problem, and fully condoning his apparent lack of trust in keeping her ignorant of a situation so closely concerning herself, feeling that she ought to stand by him and repel the stranger who had so daringly come between them with his preposterous claim upon her affection; yet from no part of her being could she call to her aid that emotion of just resentment against Marston which she knew ought to be at her command.

'I am very, very sorry,' she said at last, speaking slowly. 'I like you, of course—I think you are a noble, earnest man, and that you will do good work and overcome many difficulties; but I don't care for you in the way you wish, and it would not be right to be dishonest with you. I should like to see you get on in the world, and I am sure you will. Some

day you will write to me and tell me of your victories, and I shall be glad. It will make me happy then to know that you have forgotten—this. Now you must go. Good-bye!'

She rose, holding out her hand to him, and he saw her eyes were wet.

'Good-bye!' he said, turning away.

Edna sat down, but did not pick up her book. With her hands listless in her lap, she gazed out at the blue sky, thinking. Presently, to her surprise, Marston returned.

'You have forgotten your broom,' she said, with a wavering smile trembling on her lips.

'I had forgotten more than that,' he said, 'I had forgotten my mission.'

'Your mission?'

'Yes; my false pretences do not stop at climbing walls. I am really a traitorous messenger; for the device by which I came here was arranged by another, who wished me to bring a letter to you. He is in Eastbourne, and had written to you, but his letter was returned to him. He has written another—here it is.'

'Of whom are you speaking?'

'Mr. Barnard Hope.'

'Oh!'

She took the letter. Marston lifted his broom and went away. He wanted to leave the place and get back to London; but the gardener had cautioned him not to return until the sweeping was finished, while Barney himself impressed upon him the necessity of allowing no suspicion to arise, as it might be needful to dispatch another messenger on a similar errand. So he kept on sweeping the débris into little heaps by the side of the path. The schoolgirls disappeared into the house by twos and threes, until he found himself once more alone, and yet he did not see Edna come from the summer-house. He moved nearer and

nearer with his work to the place where they had met, hoping to catch a parting glimpse of her as she walked towards the house. At last she came out; but instead of taking the direct path to the house, she came towards him, with the thin volume she had been reading in her hand. There was a slight increase of the usual colour in her cheeks, but with that exception she had succeeded in suppressing all trace of her emotion. She looked at him with what seemed, at first, all her former straightforwardness; but, as he met her gaze, he saw that it was not quite the same: a misty shadow of difference veiled her honest eyes, so like her father's, but so much kindlier.

'I have brought you this book,' she said, holding it out to him, 'and I want you to keep it. It is the story of a messenger who was true to the trust of the one who sent him, and yet who failed.'

'But you have not read the book yourself?' he replied, taking the volume, nevertheless.

'Oh yes, I have. I was reading it for the second time to-day.'

As he hastily concealed the book under his smock, he looked anxiously about him, fearing they might be observed, unwilling to compromise her in the least. The craft of a man is rarely equal to that of a woman, no matter how young she may be. Edna smiled as she noticed his perturbation.

'There is no one to see us,' she said, 'and if there were, it would not matter. They would merely think I was giving improving literature and good advice to an under-gardener—which, indeed, is exactly what I am doing when I tell him to work hard, and—forget!'

As Edna said this, she opened her hand, and allowed to flutter upon the heap at his feet the minute fragments of a letter, which floated down through the air like a miniature snowfall; and she was gone before he could say 'Good-bye' for the second time.

Marston stood there looking down at the bits of torn paper scattered over the heap—the remnants, undoubtedly, of the letter which he had brought; and although he had received no word of encouragement—which, in spite of his disclaimer, he had yearned to hear—each separate piece of white paper reflected upwards to him a ray of hope.

CHAPTER XXV

MR. SARTWELL, as he had written to his daughter and telegraphed to Barney Hope, found himself very busy, now that the men had come back. Although he dismissed none who had taken part in the strike, he rearranged, with a dogged ruthlessness, the whole service of the Works. Few men got their old jobs back again, or their old wages. There were promotions and retrogradations, although no one was discharged. At first it seemed to the men that this was a mere brutal display of power, presided over by wanton caprice; but as time went on they began to see the glimmering of a method in the weaving of the web. Those who were degraded to the meanest and most poorly paid work the firm had to offer, were the men who had been most hot-headed in bringing on the strike, and the most persistent in opposing its conclusion. The soberer heads among the men, who had been thrust into the background during the agitation, were in every instance given promotion and higher pay; and as these changes took place one after another—for Sartwell was not the man to disorganize the Works by any sweepingly radical transformations—the general conclusion was that the manager merely desired to show the men that those whom they had valued lightly were the workmen whom he prized. Yet it could not be denied, even by those who were losers

in the game of reorganization, that the more conservative men thus advanced were among the most capable workmen in the factory. They were the men who had most to lose by a strike, and had naturally been most reluctant to enter into a contest the end of which no one could foresee. By-and-by it began to be suspected that the manager must have in his possession a complete and accurate record of every action and speech during the strike, so entirely did his shifting about of the pawns, which he played with such cool and silent relentlessness, coincide with the doings of each piece during the trouble which they thought was past and hoped had been forgotten. In some instances it seemed as if Sartwell had deliberately marked the contrast by bringing the degraded and the elevated into purposeful juxtaposition, so that his design in showing that he held the future of each man in his hand could not be misunderstood by even the most stupid of the workmen. It was a grim object-lesson, apparently intended to convey Sartwell's determination to stick by the men who, even remotely, had sympathized with him in the late struggle; for not a word was spoken, and when a man protested humbly against debasement, the manager made no reply, and the workman knew he had either to submit or to apply for his wages at the office.

In no instance was the evidence of Sartwell's silent wrath more manifest than in the cases of Braunt and Scimmins. The two men had been equal in position when the strike began, although Scimmins received rather more money than Braunt. Now Braunt was made superintendent of the upper floor, where most of the workers were women and boys; while Scimmins was given the work which had been done by one of the boys who did not return at the end of the strike. Scimmins had the double humiliation of being under the none too gentle orders of the big Yorkshireman whom he had flouted during the strike,

and also of having to accept little more than boy's wages. He cursed Sartwell loud and often; but the manager was a man who paid little heed to the curses of others; and Scimmins was not in a position to refuse the small pay which he received.

Sartwell had at last arranged the interior economy of the factory to his liking, and was just promising himself a few days' freedom from worry down at Eastbourne, when a most unlooked-for disaster overturned all his plans. Shortly before the dinner hour he was coming down the stairs from the upper floor, when a shriek, which seemed to be made up of the combined voices of those he had left a moment before, paralyzed him where he stood. The first thought that flashed through his mind was that Braunt had gone suddenly mad, and, perhaps, killed some one; for the manager had noticed, since Braunt's promotion, that he sometimes spoke wildly, while now and again there was a dangerous maniacal gleam in his eye which betokened latent insanity. Before he could turn round, two dishevelled, screaming women passed him.

'What's wrong?' he shouted after them.

'Fire!' they shrieked back at him as they fled.

As Sartwell bounded up the stairs he met no more coming down. He heard outside in the yard a man's deep voice hoarsely shouting, 'Fire! Fire!' The manager's heart sank as he thought of the numbers on the upper floor, the narrow stair-way, and the single exit. The other floors were reasonably safe, with broad stair-ways and wide doors; but the upper floor, which formerly had but few occupants, had long been a source of anxiety to him, fearing, as he did, just such a catastrophe as now seemed imminent. The remedying of this had often been agreed upon by both the owners and himself, and was among the good intentions which were at various times postponed to a more convenient season—and now the cry of 'Fire!'

was ringing in his ears, and the narrow stair-way was the only means of escape!

He found the open doorway blocked by a mass of howling human beings, each wild to escape, and each helping to make escape impossible. They were wedged and immovable, many too tightly compressed to struggle, while others further back thrashed wildly about with their arms, trying to fight their way to safety. The dangerous aromatic smell of burning pine filled the air, and smoke poured up through the lift shaft, and rolled in ever-increasing density along the ceiling. There was no flame as yet; but if the jam could not be broken, it would not need the fire itself to smother the life out of those in the hopeless contest.

'Stand back there!' cried Sartwell. 'There is no danger if you but keep cool. All of you go back to your places. I'll go in with you and be the last to leave, so there's nothing to fear.'

A red tongue of flame flashed for the winking of an eye amidst the black smoke, disappearing almost as soon as it came, but sending a momentary glow like sheet lightning over the rapidly darkening room. It was a brief but ominous reply to Sartwell's words, and he saw he might as well have spoken to the tempest. He tried to extricate one of the girls, whose wildly staring eyes and pallid lips showed that she was being crushed to death, but she was wedged as firmly in the mass as if cemented there. Sartwell, with a groan of despair, saw he was powerless in the face of this irresistible panic. He was attacking the wedge at the point, and so was at a tremendous disadvantage.

An angry roar, louder than his shout had been, called his attention to the fact that Braunt was making an assault on the wedge from the rear. The big man, using his immense strength mercilessly, was cleaving his way through the mass, grasping the women with both hands by the shoulders, and flinging them, with

a reckless carelessness of consequences, behind him, fighting his way inch by inch towards the door.

'Stand back, ye villain!' Braunt roared to Scimmins, who, crazed by fear, was trampling down all ahead of him in his frantic efforts to escape.

'It's every one for himself!' screamed Scimmins. 'I have as much right to my life as you have to yours.'

'Stand back, ye ruffian, or Ah'll strangle ye when Ah get ma hands on ye! Stand ye there, Mr. Sartwell, an' catch them when Ah throw them t' ye. The women first. Fling them down past the turn o' the stair an' they'll be safe. Stand ye there; Ah'll be at the door this minute. We'll have them all oot in a jiffy.'

While he shouted, Braunt tore his way through the crowd, and at last reached the knot in the jam where further progress was impossible. Here he stood, and by the simple power of his arms lifted girl after girl straight up, and hurled them over the heads of those in front into Sartwell's arms, who pushed them on down the stairs.

'For God's sake, Scimmins,' cried Sartwell, who from his position could see the fear-demented man pressing the crowd on Braunt and hampering him, 'be a man, and stand back! Don't fight! There's time for all to get out.'

'Ah'll crack yere skull for ye!' shouted Braunt hoarsely, over his shoulder. 'Remember ye've to pass me before ye get to the stair, an' little good yere fightin' 'ill do ye.'

At last the knot dissolved, as a log-jam on a river suddenly gives way when the key-log is removed. Braunt stood now with his back against the door-post, while Sartwell took his place at the turn of the stairs, strenuously flinging torn and ragged items of humanity into safety. Several of those who had been at the point of the wedge lay at his feet, senseless or dead—

there was no time to discover which. Now and then a girl he hurled down the stair tottered, fell, and lay where she fell.

'Why doesn't some one come to carry those women out?' groaned the manager, who had asked one after another of those whom he had saved to send help to him.

At last two of his men appeared.

'It's a bad fire, Mr. Sartwell,' said one.

'Yes, yes, I know. Take down two each, if you can, and send up more men. Tell the clerks to see that the iron doors between the buildings are closed. Are the firemen here?'

'Five engines, sir.'

'Good! Get down as quickly as you can, and send up more help.'

'Ye divil! Do ye think to sneak past me!' cried Braunt, seizing Scimmins, who had at last fought his way through.

'Don't waste time with that man, Braunt. My God, don't you see the flames? The roof will be on us in a minute! Fling him down here!'

'He stays behind me till the last soul's out,' snarled Braunt, between his teeth.

Sartwell said no more. It was no time to argue or expostulate, and Braunt, although pinning Scimmins to the wall behind him, continued to extricate the women as fast as the manager could pass them along. The knot was continually forming at the door, and was as continually unloosed by the stalwart, indefatigable arms of Braunt.

'You are smothering me,' whined Scimmins.

'Ah hope so,' said Braunt.

The situation was now hardly to be borne. The smoke ascending the stair-way met the smoke pouring through the door, yet, in spite of its density, the room was bright, for a steady column of flame roared up through the shaft, as if it were a blast-furnace.

'Are they all out?' gasped Sartwell, coughing in the choking smoke.

'Ah think so, sir; but Ah'll have a look. Some may be on the floor;' and Braunt, as he spoke, hurled Scimmins into the room ahead of him, pushing the door shut, so that Sartwell would not hear the man if he cried out. The manager, struggling in the smoke, appeared to have forgotten that Scimmins was there.

'Down on yere hands and knees, ye hound, and see if any o' the women ye felled are there!'

Scimmins was already on his knees.

'There's no one here. Open the door!—open the door!' he cried.

Braunt opened the door an inch or two.

'All oot, sir!' he shouted.

'Thank God for that!' said Sartwell. 'Come down at once. There's not a moment to lose.'

'Ah'll be doon as soon as ye are, sir. Run!'

The manager stumbled down the crackling stair, not doubting that Braunt followed.

'Now, ye crawling serpent, I'm going to keep ye here till ye're singed. I saw yere villainy, ye coward!'

The terror-stricken man mistook the purport of Braunt's words, and thus lost all chance of life.

'I swear to God, I didn't mean it!' he cried. 'The match dropped before I knowed it. God's truth, it did, Braunt!'

'What! Ye fired th' Works! Ye! With the women here ye tried to starve! Ye dropped the match! Ye crawlin', murderous fiend!'

Braunt crouched like a wild beast about to spring, his crooked fingers, claw-shaped, twitching nervously. Breathing in short, quick gasps—for the smoke had him by the throat—his fierce eyes glittering in the flames with the fearsome light of insanity, he pounced upon his writhing victim and, with arms upstretched, held the struggling figure above his head. Treading

over the quaking floor to the volcano of the roaring shaft, he shouted—

'Down, ye craven divil, into the hell ye've made!'

The long, quivering shriek of the doomed man was swallowed and quenched in the bellowing eruption of fire.

Braunt, driven by the scorching pillar of flame, tottered back to the centre of the trembling, sagging floor, and there stood with his empty hands still above his head, his face upturned, and his form swaying dimly in the stifling smoke. A fireman's axe crashed in a window; a spurt of water burst through the opening, and hissed against the ceiling.

'Jessie! Jessie! Listen! The "Dead March," my girl! The—*real*—march!'

With a rending crash the floor sank into the furnace below.

CHAPTER XXVI

BARNEY HOPE drove his tandem up and down the parade, to the glory of Eastbourne, but with small satisfaction to himself. He did not care for the admiration of those who were strangers to him. Although his state was princely, and had all the exclusiveness which attends princeliness, it was a condition of things not at all to the liking of so companionable a man as Barney. His magnificent plan, which gave employment to an amateur gardener, had apparently miscarried; for no word came from the girl at the college; and, whatever attractions the tandem had for other inhabitants of Eastbourne, it certainly seemed that Edna Sartwell did not share them, at least sufficiently to arrange for a drive with the young man and any of her companions who dared to break the rules of the college to indulge in the wild dissipation of an hour with Barney in his lofty vehicle. The young man cursed his luck and also his messenger. He was sure it was Marston's fault; some clumsiness on his part had undoubtedly spoiled everything. Now that Barney thought over Marston's demeanour when he returned, he saw—what he should have seen at the time from the gruffness and shortness of the fellow's answers—that he had made a mess of it somehow, and was ashamed to confess his failure. Marston had contented himself by merely saying to Barney that he had delivered the letter unseen, and

that the girl had given him no message to take back. No satisfying particulars could be obtained from him regarding the incidents of the meeting. Had he talked with her? Of course he had. It was necessary to explain how he came to be there. What had she said? She said very little. Had she seemed angry? She did not seem any too well pleased. And thus Barney, with industry and persistence, endeavoured to draw the truth out of a reluctant man, who appeared only too eager to get away and commune with himself, and who evidently did not appreciate the fact that it was the duty of a messenger to communicate full particulars of his embassy to his chief.

Now that Marston had so hurriedly gone back to London—probably loth to admit his diplomatic failure, yet fearing to be sent on another mission of the sort—Barney was convinced that there had been some awkward hitch in the proceedings, which was all the more annoying because he could not discover what it was; and so he set about to remedy it with that unfailing tact of which he knew himself to be possessed. For once in his life Barney had to confess that he did not know what to do. He did not care to return to London and admit defeat, even to himself. One of his favourite boasts was that he never knew defeat; for where—to use his own language—he could not pull it off himself, Providence always stepped in to give him the necessary aid. He began to fear that his customary accuracy in detecting the interposition had for once failed him; for he remembered that he had looked on the unexpected advent of Marston as a distinct manifestation that fortune still favoured him; but, as day after day passed and no answer came to the letter he had sent, Barney began to have doubts as to the genuineness of the intervention on this occasion. At last, in deep gloom, he came to the conclusion that life under present circumstances was

not worth living, if it had to be lived in Eastbourne without knowing a soul, and reluctantly he determined to return to London also. He ordered out his tandem for a final exhibition, remembering that, even though he took no pleasure in it himself, it would be cruel to deprive the loungers along the parade of their usual delight in watching the elegance of the turn-out, and his own skill in handling a team placed end-wise. After all, the innocent frequenters of Eastbourne were not to blame for what had happened; so why should they be punished unnecessarily? said the ever-just Barney to himself. They should be allowed to feast their eyes for the last time on the tandem and its master, and Heaven help them when he finally departed! Barney mounted his chariot with a sigh; for, apart from the fact that this was in a measure a last act—and last acts always carry a certain amount of pathos with them—it is depressing to have it proven that one is after all under no special protection, and to have doubt cast on former instances which heretofore stood unchallenged.

Barney drove his spirited horses with perhaps less than his customary dash, a chastened dignity taking the place of the exuberant confidence which generally distinguished him. The bracing air, the rapid motion, the feeling of controlling destiny which a man has when he is driving tandem, all failed to raise his spirits, as might have been expected; for the very fact that he was driving alone emphasized his disappointment, and made this world the hollow mockery it sometimes seems to the most cheerful of us. Yet how often has it been said, in varying forms, that the darkest hour is just before the dawn!—and how often will men forget that simple nocturnal fact!—a defect of memory the more remarkable in a person like Barney, who so frequently had had opportunity, while on his way home from a post-midnight revel, of verifying the phenomenon. Just when his despair was at its

blackest—on the fourth drive down the parade—he was amazed and delighted to see Edna Sartwell coming down one of the side-streets all alone. She had a newspaper in her hand, and was looking anxiously, and, as Barney could not fail to see, furtively, up and down the street, apparently expecting to meet some one, yet fearing that her intention might be divined. Barney understood the whole situation in a flash: she had been afraid to write, or had been prevented from writing, and had stolen alone from the college in the hope of meeting him. Well, they all did it, so far as Barney was concerned; and, in the glow of exultation which came over him at this proof of success, and the assurance that, after all, his luck—or whatever it was—had not deserted him, there was just a faint, annoying tinge of regret that she was no more proof against his fascinations than all the others had been. Man is but an uncertain creature at best, and never knows just what he does want. A moment before, it would have seemed to him that nothing on earth could have given him greater pleasure than a sight of her; and yet, now that he saw her looking for him, he was actually sorry that she had not been walking unconcernedly along the pavement like those who were strangers to him.

However, it must be added in Barney's favour that this feeling of being perhaps a trifle too much sought after was but transitory, and that it did not for a moment interfere with his action. He pulled up his team with a suddenness which caused the front horse to turn round and face its driver; then Barney threw the reins to his groom, and jumped down with a grace and celerity as charming in its way as was his driving. The groom disentangled the horses, as Barney accosted Edna with that urbanity which was perhaps his distinguishing characteristic. The girl seemed surprised to see him, and was plainly more than a little embarrassed.

'I am so glad to meet you!' cried Barney. 'Why, the very sight of you makes this dull old Eastbourne smile like a rose, don't you know. I haven't had a soul to speak to for ages, and I began to fear I should lose the use of language. I give you my word, it's the truth! I do think—that is, I did, until I saw you—that Eastbourne is the dullest spot on earth.'

'Then why did you come here?' asked the girl.

'Oh, now, I say, Miss Sartwell, that's rather too bad! It is, I assure you. You know I said in my letter I came solely for the pleasure of seeing you.'

'So you did. I had forgotten.'

'Yes; and you never even answered my note, Miss Sartwell. I call that rather hard, don't you know.'

'You see, Mr. Hope, we are not allowed to write letters from the college; that is one of the strictest rules.'

'And are you so afraid of breaking a rule as all that? When I was at school the delight of being there was the breaking of all rules—and of most other things as well. I thought perhaps you would not mind breaking a rule for once, even if only out of pity for a friend stranded on this inhospitable coast.'

Edna blushed when he spoke of the breaking of rules; then she lifted her honest eyes to his and said—

'I am afraid I pay too little attention to the rules after all my pretence of regard for them. I am breaking a rule in being here now; but I was so anxious to see a newspaper that I stole out to buy one. That is why I am here; and I ought not to stand talking to you, but must go back at once.'

'But I say, Miss Sartwell,' protested Barney, 'if you break a rule merely to buy a paper, surely you will break another, or keep on fracturing the same one, when you know how much pleasure it will give me to take you for a little drive.'

'Oh, I couldn't think of such a thing, Mr. Hope—I couldn't, indeed, and you must not ask me! I

wanted the paper to see if there was anything more about the fire. I should never have known about it had my father not sent me a short telegram which gave no particulars. I suppose he did not have time to write.'

'What fire?'

'The fire at the Works.'

'Bless me! Has there been a fire?'

'Didn't you know? There has been a terrible fire; the east wing is destroyed, and two men have lost their lives—two of the workmen. There would have been a frightful loss of life had it not been for one of the men who is dead. It is supposed, so the papers say, that in trying to save the life of the other he lost his own.'

'Dear me! how perfectly awful! I wonder why Mr. Sartwell didn't wire me, as neither father nor Monkton is there. You see I never read the papers myself—never have any interest in them. If a fellow could only know when there is to be something in them worth while, it wouldn't be so bad; but one can't go on buying them every day, in the hope that there will some time be something in them, don't you know. Besides, people generally tell me all the news, so I don't need to read. I hear even more than I want to hear, without looking at the papers; but you see, I know nobody down here, and so am slightly behind in the news of the day.'

'I must go now,' repeated Edna, who had listened to his remarks with ill-disguised uneasiness.

'Oh, but that's just what you mustn't do!' cried Barney, with great eagerness. 'Have pity, if not on my loneliness, at least on my hopeless ignorance, don't you know, in a matter that I, of all others, ought to be interested—vitally interested—in. You see there may be no insurance, and perhaps I'm a beggar—may have to sell my tandem, don't you know; sacrifice my pictures, and all that sort of thing. I must hear about

the fire, and all about it. It's of more importance even than the condition of the working-man, to me at least, dear as that subject is and—all—interwoven—as I may say, with my very—ah—being—the working-man, don't you know.'

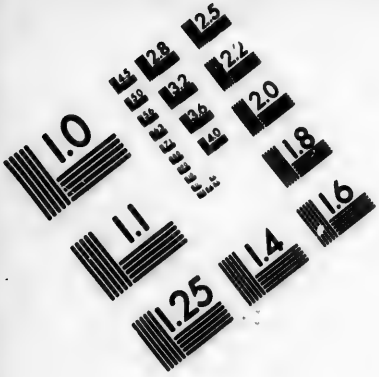
'But,' protested his anxious listener, 'I know nothing about the insurance—nothing whatever. You should go at once to London, by the very first train. There has been an inquest, and I expect to find a report of it in this paper. You can buy a paper at the station, and then you will learn everything that is to be known until you reach London.'

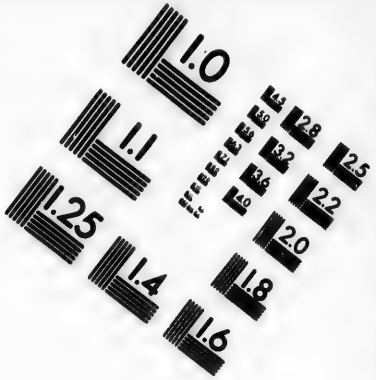
'I say, Miss Sartwell,' said Barney, in an injured tone, 'you surely can't expect me to understand what's in the paper! I never could, don't you know. They seem to print such bally rubbish. Now you can explain it all to me in a very short time—you always make everything so clear. If you will just step into this cart of mine, I'll drive out of town and round behind the college; then no one will see us, and you can reach there much more quickly than if you walked, don't you know.'

The girl frowned, and Barney saw with surprise that she perhaps had, after all, some of her father's impatience. He felt he was not progressing quite as favourably as he had anticipated; but a few words would put that right, if he could but get her to go with him for a drive.

'Mr. Hope,' she said, severely, 'you will pardon me if I say that, under the circumstances, you should be busy in London rather than loitering at Eastbourne. An unexpected calamity has happened; the business is deranged, and men are out of work just now when they need it most; yet here you stand idly talking of tandems and driving!'

Barney opened his eyes wide with astonishment. Here actually was censure, plain and undisguised. He had never encountered it before from any lady,





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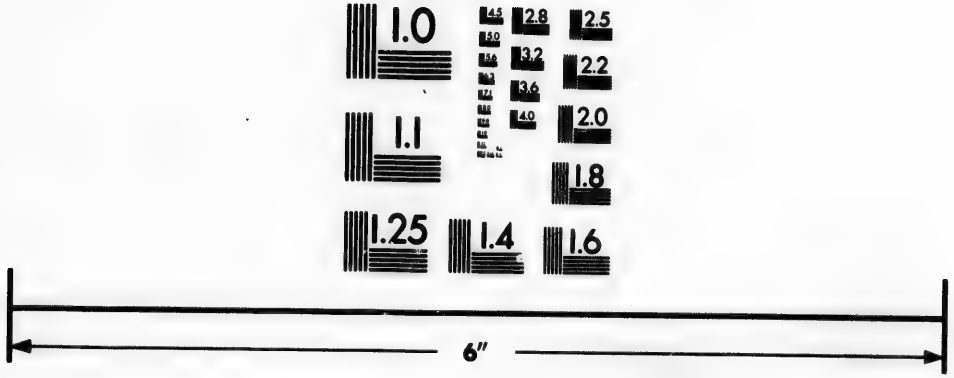

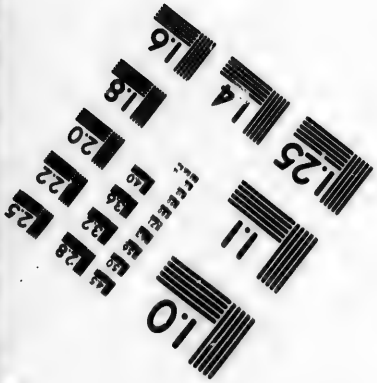

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except perhaps from his mother—and she did not count; for, as he knew, she would be the first to resent blame placed upon him by any one else.

'But—but what can *I* do?' stammered the unfortunate young man, with strong emphasis on the personal pronoun.

'I don't know what you can do; but that is what I should find out, if I were in your place.'

'Nobody pays the slightest attention to what I say: they never did, and it's not likely they are going to begin now. Your father didn't even take the trouble to telegraph, although he knows that I'm here.'

'He knows you are here?'

'Of course. He was coming with me, and both of us were going to call upon you; but, unluckily for me, he couldn't come, and here I am stranded; and I must say, when you talk like that, I think fate is a little hard on me.'

As the girl looked at him, her expression softened; she had a keen sense of justice, and felt that she was perhaps unfair to him.

'I had no intention of saying anything harsh,' she replied. 'I merely told you what I thought any one in your position would do. Don't you agree with me?'

'I always agree with you, Miss Sartwell. I'm rather a blockhead, at best, don't you know; but I usually recognize the right thing when some one points it out to me. That's one great fault I find with myself: I don't see things till after every one else has seen them; then they all seem so plain that I wonder I didn't notice them before. People are so impatient with a fellow like me, that sometimes I feel sorry for myself—I give you my word I do! If they would take a little pains—but then, of course, no one ever cares whether a fellow goes right or wrong.'

'Oh yes, they do!' cried the girl, quickly. 'I'm sure I care very much.'

'You think you do,' replied Barney, dejectedly; 'but you won't even risk a slight scolding at the college to give me the advice I need at the time I need it most. But that's the way of the world,' continued the ill-used young man, with a deep sigh. 'All I want you to do is to take a short drive with me, and tell me what you know of the disaster, and what you think I ought to do under the circumstances. I brought this tandem from London on purpose to take you out. It isn't as if I were suggesting anything clandestine, for I came with your father's approval. I wrote to the mistress of the college, telling her so, but she answered with a sharp reprimand. Then I wrote directly to you, but my letter was returned with an intimation that I was trying to do something underhand. So, you see, I made every effort to be square and honest, but the honest people wouldn't have it. That's the sort of conduct which drives men to crime. Then I took to more questionable methods, and got that young fellow—I forget his name—to carry a letter to you. Then you were offended and——'

'Oh no!'

'It's nice of you to say so,' Barney went on, mournfully; 'but I am so used to disappointment that a little extra, more or less, doesn't matter. I see now I was wrong to send that letter in the way I did—I always see those things after; but I was forced into it. I expect to end up in prison some day, and never realize my crime until the judge sentences me. I suppose I ought to be above the need of an encouraging word now and then, but I don't seem to be.'

'What do you wish me to do?' asked the girl, a shade of perplexity coming over her face.

'All I wish is a little straightforward clear-headed advice. Art beckons me in one direction, and advises me to leave business alone. You said just now that my place was at the Works, and that I shouldn't be idling here when there was so much to be done.

Mr. Sartwell quite evidently hopes I shall keep out of the way, or he would have told me of the fire. I seem to be a superfluous person, not wanted anywhere—not even by the police. What do I wish you to do? I wish you to let me take you for a little drive into the country, and tell me how I can help your father at this crisis.'

'One is so conspicuous up there,' she said, glancing with distrust at the waiting tandem. 'No; let us walk to the end of the parade. There we can sit down, and I will tell you all I know about the fire, and, if my advice is worth anything, you shall have it. After that you must let me return to the college alone.'

Barney was forced to content himself with this, and he reluctantly ordered the groom to take the horses to the stables.

The two young people strolled along the parade to the most sheltered seat, where they sat down together. Barney's mind was in a whirl; the coldness of his reception excited him, and made him fearful of losing what he had thought, up to that time, was his for the asking.

He proposed to the girl, and was rejected.

CHAPTER XXVII

THERE is an idea prevalent that the young women of our land welcome addresses which the golden youth of the opposite sex urge upon their consideration; and that a girl's happiness is augmented in proportion to the number of proposals bestowed upon her. This, however, is merely a supposition; and there are unfortunately no statistics to which an historian, anxious to be accurate in statement, may turn, in order to substantiate or overthrow this almost universally held opinion. It is to be regretted that the census, which gathers together in tabulated form so many interesting facts pertaining to the race, gives no attention to this particular subdivision of human data; and that, so far from being able to form any definite estimate of the feeling with which a girl welcomes the undoubted compliment of a marriage-offer, we are left in the dark as to the average number of proposals which a woman receives, say, between the ages of seventeen and thirty-seven. An inquisitive Government which does not hesitate to ask a woman every ten years to set down her age in black and white seems, strangely enough, to shrink from inquiring into a vital question on which the future well-being of a nation largely depends; thus no one can positively state that matrimonial advances are held in high estimation by their recipients, clinching the proposition by referring the doubter to Blue Book such a number and such a page.

It being thus impossible to generalize, the careful writer is compelled to fall back on individual instances, and it must be set down that Edna Sartwell, so far from being made happy by the fact that two young men within one week had asked her to share their varying fortunes, walked hurriedly back to the college, filled with terror and dismay. On the very threshold of womanhood she had suddenly and unexpectedly been brought face to face with a state of things which made her wish to shrink back into the untroubled tranquillity of the life she had hitherto led. These two disquieting events, following one so closely on the other, loomed before her in undue proportion to their importance, and threatened to overshadow the future. It seemed an appalling thing that the fate of two men should be placed at her disposal; that on her shoulders should be cast the great responsibility of deciding, unaided, a momentous question with far-reaching consequences. And if the first two young men with whom she became acquainted acted thus, what was to be expected from the numerous host she was still likely to meet? A pathway strewn with broken hearts offered no allurements to the feet of the young traveller; a life lived in an atmosphere of deep sighs was intolerable. The girl was frightened at the outlook, which was all the more bewildering because only partly understood. 'It is often as important to classify your problem as to solve it,' her father had once said to her; but solution or classification appeared equally difficult to her.

Barney had taken his rejection badly. He made no attempt to conceal the fact that his life was blighted; that he would re-enter the world a changed man, but heroically determined to make the most out of the wreck. Along the austere, rugged road which now lay before him, unbrightened by love or human sympathy, he would walk with grim, if sombre, resolution; brushing aside the frivolities of existence;

setting his face with sullen but dogged persistence towards the cheerless end of life; hoping for no recompence except that perhaps he might have the consolation of knowing that he left the world a trifle better for having lived in it.

Inexperienced as she was, Edna could not help contrasting the actions of Hope and Marston, not altogether to the disadvantage of the latter. There was no question in her mind that Marston had in reality an uphill road to travel; yet he had gone into no heroics about it, and he asked nothing but that she should remember him. She had been sorry she could give no encouraging word to Marston; but Barney made her feel somehow that she was to blame in his case, and that he was an ill-used man. Then, it was difficult to realize the serious nature or hardship of Barney's future career, when every one knew that he had more money than was good for him. Some thought of this seemed to occur to Barney himself at the time, for he spoke bitterly and contemptuously of his wealth, and of how it handicapped him; however, he was going to give it all away when he came into his full fortune, and start the world afresh, winning his laurels and what little cash would suffice for his frugal needs, with his good right arm, assisted presumably by his paint-brushes; so in the face of this noble resolution it would have been unfair to censure him for the possession of riches which he had certainly no hand in accumulating.

Edna hurried towards the college, thinking little of the reprimand in store for her, and much of the contrary conditions of this world. She, like Barney, needed advice, yet had no one in whom she might confide. She thought of writing fully to her father, remembering her promise to tell him everything that troubled her; but she shrank from the thought almost as soon as it took form in her mind. Besides, both complications were settled finally and for ever, so why

worry him unnecessarily about a page of her life on which was written the word 'Finis'? There surged up in her heart a deep, passionate yearning for the mother she had never known, and whom she now missed as she had never missed her before. As she thought of the portrait of the beautiful, sweet-looking woman in her father's office, whose pathetic eyes shone so tenderly and lovingly upon her, the tears which had been near the surface suddenly blinded her, and she sobbed—

'I am alone—alone!'

On reaching the college, Edna went directly to her room, where she found a letter from her step-mother awaiting her; and this helped more than anything else to drive away the sad thoughts which filled her mind. The letter ran thus:

'MY POOR DEAR EDNA,

'You will doubtless have heard of the dreadful calamity that has overtaken the business of Monkton and Hope, a calamity from which I fear it may never recover; although your father, as usual, scoffs at what I predict, and says they are fully insured—as if an insurance policy could cover the far-reaching effects of such a disaster! There seems little doubt that the fire was caused by some of the disaffected men, exasperated, probably, by the treatment they have received, although that is no excuse for the crime. But we are all short-seeing, misguided creatures here below, with the taint of original sin in each of us; unable, unless directed by a Higher Power, to take even the slightest action which will be acceptable; and prone ever to slip and stumble if we neglect those warnings which for our benefit are showered on the just and the unjust alike: but if warnings are passed by—or, worse still, scoffed at—how can we hope to profit by them and mend our ways, as an ever-indulgent Providence—eager to forgive, if we but exhibit a desire for forgiveness—intended they should? And when I asked your father in a most gentle and respectful (I hope I know my duty as a wife by this time!) way if the fire had not pointed a great moral to him, he said with most regrettable flippancy—which I have sometimes attempted to correct in you, my poor child!—that it pointed the moral to be well insured and to have fire-escapes from the upper floors; as if ribaldry like that was not very much out of place in speaking of a solemn event where two immortal souls went to their last

account without a moment's warning—going, for aught we know, through perishable fire to flames that are never quenched! The usefulness of this thought makes no impression on your father, who is as stubborn as ever, and I fear no more just to his men than before all this happened. A poor young man named Marston has been ruthlessly discharged by your father, and may now be wandering about the streets, looking for work and starving, for all any one knows or cares. Ask your father why he was discharged if you want to know, but don't ask me. It is nothing but pride—pride—pride! My child, take warning while there is yet time, for the night cometh. Harden not your heart.

'I shall continue to petition for you both, for the mercy is unfailing and unlimited.

'Your loving but sorrowing mother,

'SARAH SARTWELL.'

The benevolent intentions of this letter were in no wise frustrated, and Mrs. Sartwell would doubtless have been pleased had she known that the reading of it did the recipient a world of good. It acted as a tonic, and gave Edna something to think about, preventing any morbid reflections on the wreck which she had made of Barney's life.

The discharge of Marston was a great shock to the girl, and for the first time in her life she thought her father had acted unjustly. In pondering upon the unexpected piece of information, she thought her father had, in some way, heard of the young man's visit to Eastbourne; but as she turned the subject over in her mind she came to the conclusion that his dismissal was the result of their meeting in the garden at home and the finding of Marston there by her father. The reason, then, the young man had opportunity to come to Eastbourne, was because his time was now his own. And yet he had said nothing about it, even when she asked him how he got away from duty. He had spoken well of her father, although he must have felt that he had been harshly treated. She had thought nothing of his good words at the time, but now they came back to her. She determined to write to her father, and tell him all

about Marston's visit and its result; but when she sat down, with the paper before her, she found she did not know how to begin. She wished to ask him to repair the unnecessary wrong he had done Marston, for there was not the slightest chance of her ever marrying the young man; but, somehow, when she came to put this all down on paper, the task seemed very difficult. The difficulty was increased by the knowledge that her father must at that moment have as much on his mind as any one should be called upon to bear; and she pictured the silent man sitting at home, tired out with the work and worry of the day, while the monotonous voice of his wife drew moral lessons from every new obstacle he had to surmount. No; she would not add a single care to those already on his shoulders.

The girl sat with her elbows on the desk, her chin in her hands, and gazed with troubled eyes into vacancy, as if the problems which beset her were in the air before her and could be hypnotized into solution. A bewildering feature of the case was that she had continually, of late, to readjust her ideas, and bring them into correct relationship with some new fact which came within her cognizance. All the conversations she had held with her father; many of his actions; bore quite a new significance when she learned that he knew Marston loved her. Again, the fact of Marston's dismissal lent a sharp poignancy to her remembrance of his fervent declaration that, for her sake, he would strive to please any master placed over him, as no man had ever striven before. Edna did not share her stepmother's fear that the young man was starving; but her imagination kindled at the thought of his impassioned words, his resolute determination to succeed, addressed to the daughter of the man who a day or two before had turned him into the streets. The more she thought about her father's action, the more

unjust it seemed. A dozen times she began a letter, and as often relapsed again into reverie. Barney and his mythical woes faded entirely from her memory. Gradually she came to the conclusion that, if she did not intervene in Marston's interests, she would be making herself responsible for the continuance of the injustice; and, although she wished to relieve her father from all anxiety regarding her feelings towards the young man, still she was ashamed to touch upon that part of the subject. It might be possible some time, when she sat at her father's knee, to tell him about it, with averted face; but to write it, she could not.

At last she succeeded in drafting a letter, which she hurriedly posted, fearing that longer meditation upon the question might result in its not being sent at all.

'DEAR FATHER,

'I am sure you must be very busy, and perhaps very much worried at the present moment. You know I do not wish to add to your burden, and would rather lighten it if I could; but in that I am as helpless as you are strong. We made a compact a while since, and that is why I write. Something has happened for which I feel partly responsible. In a letter received to-day from my step-mother she says you have discharged Mr. Marston, and she thinks he may now be looking in vain for employment. I am afraid you were not pleased at finding him talking to me in our garden, but that was my fault and not his. If that was the reason, won't you please reconsider and invite him back?

'Your loving daughter,

'EDNA.'

The answer came almost before she thought her letter had had time to reach London.

'MY DEAR LITTLE GIRL,

'I should have written days ago, but unfortunately I cannot dictate an affectionate letter through my shorthand clerk, and the older I grow the more I dislike writing with my own hand. Worried? Oh dear, no! Why should one worry? I'm afraid your belligerent old father still loves a fight, whether with circumstances or with men. Before the fire was out, telegraphic

orders were dispatched to three machinery firms in the North. While the fire-engines were still flinging water on the ruins, I had secured a lease of the four houses which adjoin the Works; had compounded with the tenants, and sent them packing. That night men were at work knocking doorways through the partitions and strengthening the floors. Happily the engines and boilers were not injured, being in a separate building, and already such machinery as we could get is in place, and a long, sagging, wabbling iron rope carries the power across the yard. The new secretary of the Union proposed a conference with me to discuss what the firm was willing to do for the men thrown out of work by the fire. I refused to discuss anything with the new secretary, he not being employed at the Works. He is a shrewder man than Gibbons; so he at once got together a deputation of my own men, and sent them to me. I received them, of course, and they asked me if I would give them fifteen per cent. of their wages while out of work. "No," said I, "I can always do better than the Union. There will be paid one hundred per cent. of the wages, not fifteen; I expect you all back at the Works on Monday." I fancy I made the men open their eyes a bit. Work will be going on as usual within a week, and we won't be behind with a single order. The new factory which is now begun will be built in accordance with modern ideas, and I expect to be able to increase our business so that the four houses leased will be retained when the new building is ready for occupation. Forgive this patting of myself on the shoulder, but a man must brag now and then to some one, and you, my dear Edna, are the only one to whom I can boast.

'Yes, the compact is still in operation, and I'm glad you wrote about your step-mother's letter, although I hope you will not take too seriously any half-hysterical comments on my tyrannical conduct. A man must act, and one who acts is bound to make mistakes. Perhaps the discharge of Marston was a mistake. I don't think so, but of course your step-mother does, and, as facts always embarrass her, she sees instant starvation and all the rest of it. Everything, Edna, depends on the point of view. A lighted match is dropped by accident or design, and, falling on inflammable material, certain chemical changes take place; carbonic acid gas is produced, and a factory goes down in ruins to supply the materials for combustion. All this seems perfectly natural to me, and in accordance with established scientific research. But your step-mother's point of view is different. She sees the finger of Providence; and because I don't, I'm a scoffer. Now, I've as great a belief and trust in Providence as any one, but to me Providence works sanely. It doesn't destroy a factory and kill two men merely to show me I'm in error, because it could accomplish its purpose at much less

expense and trouble. I can't think that Providence is less sensible than my little girl, and she takes the right method. She says in kindly fashion, "Father, I think you are wrong, and I want you to reconsider." She does not try to prove me a heartless despot. I would at once reconsider, and would invite Marston back, but it is not necessary. He is the new secretary of the Union, with a salary larger than the wages he had here, with his time practically his own, and with ample opportunity for mischief if he chooses to exercise his power. I feel it in my bones that in one or two or three years I shall have to fight him. It will be an interesting struggle, but I shall win. So with this final bit of brag I close my long letter. I hope to run down and see you on Saturday, and meanwhile all the sympathy you have to spare, lavish on that iron-handed tyrant,

'Your father,
'J. S.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

BARNEY abandoned his tandem to the tender care of his man, and went up to London by train. He sat gloomily in a corner of a first-class smoking-compartment, and cursed the world. Nevertheless he was able to consume a great number of cigarettes between the sea and Charing Cross, and, as he smoked, he made stern, heroic resolutions regarding his career. He would now take it seriously in hand. He would business-manage himself. He saw in the clear light of a great disappointment that he had hitherto paid too much attention to the production of masterpieces, and too little to the advertising of them. It was evidently hopeless to expect the appreciation of a stupid and uncritical public to come to his work; and the great critic whom he had confidently looked for, had not yet put in an appearance. If, then, the critic would not come to Mahomet, Mahomet would go to the critic. He would purchase the most expensive art-critic there was in the market; then the tardy public would learn that a genius had lived among them unrecognized!

As his comprehensive plans took final shape the train ran into the glass-roofed tunnel at Charing Cross. Barney sprang into a hansom, and drove directly to the Works. 'Beastly hole!' he said to himself, as he gazed round at the ruin which the fire had wrought.

The ground was covered with cluttering heaps of burnt and twisted iron; and piles of new material for building were scattered everywhere. The apparent confusion and ugliness of it all offended his artistic sense, and he thanked his stars it was not necessary for him to spend his days there. He accosted Sartwell, who had been discussing some question with the architect, and shook the manager's hand with energy and cordiality.

'Mr. Sartwell,' he cried, 'I came the moment I heard of the fire.'

'Ah,' said the manager, dryly. 'Have you been in America?'

'No,' laughed Barney, 'not quite so far away as that; but, don't you know, I never read the papers, and so heard of the conflagration purely by accident. Now, I am here entirely at your disposal, and am ready to do anything and everything you want done. I would rather not carry bricks, if there is anything else I can do; but I am willing to help in any way I can. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Sartwell, that, in placing myself at the disposal of the firm, I do so at considerable sacrifice; for art is long and time is fleeting, and I have work to do in my studio that you, perhaps, might not think worth doing; but I hope posterity will not agree with you, don't you know. Still, I am here. Command me.'

'Indeed, you do me wrong,' said Sartwell, with a grim smile. 'I consider you of much greater value in the studio than here. I have no doubt posterity and I will quite agree in our estimate of your efforts. Artists are few and labourers many. It would be a real disaster if our present crisis were to interfere with your artistic work. Therefore, although I am flattered by your generous offer of help, I could not think of availing myself of it. No; the studio is your place, Mr. Hope.'

'It's uncommonly kind of you, Mr. Sartwell, to say

so many nice things about my painting, and I give you my word I appreciate them, for I don't have too much encouragement—I don't, I assure you. This is such a beastly materialistic world, don't you know. Has my father got home yet?'

'Yes; he returned last night.'

'Ah, I didn't know that. Terribly upset, I suppose?'

'A trifle worried.'

'Naturally he would be. Well, there's nothing I can do for you, then?'

'Nothing, unless you undertake the decoration of the new factory, and thus send it down to posterity with the Vatican frescoes. Still, that question won't arise for a month or two yet.'

'Quite so. I'll think about it. Well, if you need me, you know my address. A wire will bring me at any time.'

'It's generous of you to stand ready to leap into the chasm in this way, but take my advice and stick to the studio. Nevertheless, I'll remember, and let you know if a crisis arises with which I am unable to deal single-handed.'

'Do!' cried Barney, again shaking hands with good-natured effusion. 'Well, good-bye!'

He picked his way to the gates, and stepped into his waiting hansom, a well-merited feeling of having answered the stern call of duty cheering his heart as he drove away.

It was a long drive to Haldiman's studio, and Barney, telling the cabman he might have to wait an hour or two, dashed up the steps and rang the bell. Being admitted, he asked if Haldiman was at home; then sprang up the stairs, struck one startling knock on the studio door with the head of his stick, and entered.

Haldiman stood at his easel, a black pipe in his mouth, an old jacket on his back, and a general air

about him of not having brushed his hair for a week. A half-finished drawing in black and white decorated a great sheet of cardboard placed on the easel.

'Hello, Barney!' he cried. 'I thought that was your delicate way of announcing yourself. You look as trim and well groomed as a shop-walker. Haven't given up painting and taken to that line, have you?'

'No, old man, I haven't!' shouted Barney, slamming the door behind him and coming into the room like a cyclone. 'And I'm not trim, for I have just had a railway journey, and went from Charing Cross to the Works, and from the Works here. I've had no time to go to the club and make myself pretty; I was in too much of a hurry to see you. So don't be sarcastic, Haldiman.'

'Everything is comparative, Barney, and to me you look like a radiant being from another and a better world, where a man has unlimited credit with his tailor. Sit down, won't you?'

'That's what I came for. I say, Haldiman, where do you keep your exhilarating fluid and the siphons? I'm tired out. Be hospitable. You see I've a load on my mind these days. The Works were partly destroyed by fire, and we're rebuilding and all that sort of thing, don't you know, which rather takes it out of a fellow, looking after workmen and seeing that no mistakes are made.'

'Oh, I saw about that in the papers, and was wondering if it was your shop,' said Haldiman, placing a small table beside his friend, and putting a bottle, a siphon, and a glass upon it. 'Help yourself, my boy. You don't mind my going on with my work?'

'But I do!' cried Barney. 'Sit down yourself, Haldiman. I want to talk to you seriously.'

'I am behindhand with this picture now, Barney. I can work and listen. Fire away.'

'Look here, Haldiman, how much do you get for a smear like that?'

Haldiman stood back and looked critically at the picture, then said with a drawl—

'Well, I'm in hopes of looting four guineas out of the pirate who edits the magazine this is for. It's a full page, you know.'

'Great heavens! Imagine a man doing a picture for such a sum as that! I wouldn't draw a line under a hundred pounds.'

'I've often thought of putting my price up to that entrancing figure,' replied Haldiman, reflectively, 'but refrained for fear of bankrupting the magazines. One must have some consideration for the sixpenny press.'

Barney thrust his hand deep into his trousers pocket, drew out a fist-full of coins, selected four sovereigns and four shillings, and placed them on the table, saying—

'There, Haldiman, there's your guineas. I buy that picture. Now sit down and talk to me. I want your whole attention.'

Haldiman stood for a moment looking alternately at the money and at the man. At last he spoke, slowly and quietly.

'Some day, Barney, you'll do a thing like that, and get smashed in consequence. I'm unfortunately unable to throw you out of the window myself; but there is a cabman loitering about in front, and I will call him in to assist me if you don't at once put that money in your pocket. Don't make me violate the sacred rules of hospitality.'

'You have violated them, Hal, already, by getting angry. I see you're angry, so don't deny it. Besides, the cabman wouldn't come; I own him, and if he did interfere I could put you both out.'

'You can't hire me, like a cabman, you know, Barney.'

'Of course not, of course not. I'm not trying to, dear boy. Do sit down and be sensible. I've come to you as one friend to another, for I'm at a crisis in

my career, I need help, so be good to me. I take a serious view of life now, and——'

'Since when?'

'Since this morning, if you like. The "when" doesn't matter. I've come to the conclusion that I'm wasting my existence. You'll scoff, of course, but I know I have genius—not talent, mind, but genius. There's no use of making any bones about it, or pretending false modesty: if a man is a genius, he knows it. Very well, then, why not say so?'

'I see no reason against it.'

'Quite so. Now, Haldiman, how much money do you make in a year?'

'You mean, how little?'

'Put it any way you like. Name the figure.'

'What's that got to do with your genius?'

'Never you mind. What's the amount?'

'Now, Barney, if you're cooking up some new kind of financial insult, I give you fair warning I won't stand it.'

Barney had gulped down his stimulant, and now paced up and down the room, clearing a track for himself by kicking things out of the way. Haldiman sat in a deep arm-chair, his legs stretched out, and his hands in his pockets, watching his friend's energetic march to and fro.

'The artistic profession,' cried the pedestrian, 'has been held up to the scorn of the world since painting began. Read any novel, and you will see that, if the heroine is to make a doocedly bad marriage, she invariably falls in love with an artist—invariably.'

'Well, she generally marries us.'

'Yes, and lives in misery ever after.'

'Oh, we're generous, and share it with her.'

'You see what I mean. The artist is held up to contempt, and all respectable people in the book are aghast at the girl's choice. Now, why is this?'

'Ask me a harder one. It is because fiction is

notoriously untrue to life. The wives of the Royal Academy live in a splendour and luxury undreamed of by the ordinary lady of title.'

'Nothing of the sort. It's because the artists don't business-manage themselves. They have no commercial sense. Therefore they are poor. Now, if a man invents a soap, what does he do?'

'Washes himself.'

'He advertises it. He becomes rich. Why, then, if a man writes a great book, should he not advertise himself and his book in every way that is open to him?'

'I believe he does, Barney. Where have you been living this while back to be so ignorant of the approved modern methods in art and literature?'

'Isn't a great picture of more value to the world than a much-advertised soap?'

'Well, if you ask me, I should say, no. I'd back the soap as a civilizer against the Louvre any day.'

Barney stopped in his walk, raised his arms above his head, and let them drop heavily to his sides.

'I haven't a friend in the world!' he cried, in tragic tones. 'Not one—not one!'

'Barney, this conversation is bewildering. What are you driving at, anyhow? Art, soap, literature, advertising, friendship, marriage—what's wrong? Who is the woman?'

'Don't talk to me about women! I hate them!'

'I thought you were most successful in that line. I believe I have your own authority for the statement.'

'Success! One is successful up to a point; then there is a disappointment which shows what a sham success has been. I'll never speak to a woman again.'

'I've been there myself—several times. Still we always return—if not to our first love, to our fourth, or fifth. As for friends, I don't know any man who has more.'

'Not true friends, Haldiman. I haven't one, I tell

you. I did think you were a friend, and you do nothing but sneer at me. You think I don't see it; I do, all the same. I'm the most sensitive of men, although nobody appears to appreciate it.'

'I don't sneer at you, Barney. What put that in your head? I think you sometimes fail to appreciate other people's sensitiveness. You are a trifle prone to flaunt Bank of England notes in the faces of those not so well provided with them as you are. Then the sensitive soul rises in rebellion.'

'That's my unfortunate manner, Haldiman. I don't really mean to do so. If I had a game leg, or a club foot, and came thumping in here with it, you wouldn't make fun of my defect, would you? Of course not. Well, why should you resent a defect of manner when you know my intentions are good?'

'I don't resent anything about you, Barney—at least only spasmodically.'

'You know I'd go to the end of the world to serve a friend—I would, honest! Yet I've no luck. Here is a poor devil of a musician I am trying to befriend. I can see he dislikes me intensely. I got a publisher to bring out some of his music—paid all the expenses—yet it was like pulling teeth to get that organist to allow me to help him, and he's a genius if ever there was one. I got a select and appreciative audience together to hear him play. He didn't come, although he promised to do so, and the people thought I was trying to make fools of them. It must be all my accursed manner. Now you always know the right thing to say: I don't. My genius doesn't run that way. I'm an artist.'

Haldiman threw back his head and laughed. Barney stared at him, displeasure on his brow.

'What the deuce are you laughing at now?'

'Forgive me, Barney; I'm laughing at the thumping of your club foot, although you did not believe me capable of it.'

'What have I said?'

'Nothing—nothing. Barney, I love you! You are the one and only Barnard Hope; all others are base imitations. Now listen to me. I haven't the faintest idea what it is you want. This conversation has been simply encyclopaedic in the amount of ground covered; but I'll do for you what you would do for me, short of abduction or assassination. I'd prefer not to land myself in prison, if you don't mind, but I'll even run the risk of that. What do you want? Out with it!'

'But the moment I begin, you'll sa ou're insulted. You terrorize me, Haldiman,—'po my soul, you do!'

'Go on. For ten minutes insults are barred. *Will* you go on?'

'Very well. I asked you how much you made in a year, and you jeered at me.'

'I never keep accounts, and never pay a debt until the brokers come in, so I really haven't the slightest idea. You can guess at the amount just as well as I can. Guess and proceed.'

'All right. I want to pay you double your yearly income for your help in this matter.'

'That isn't friendship, that's commercialism again. I beg pardon, I forgot. Don't look daggers, Barney; I accept. Can I have the money in advance?'

'Of course you can,' cried Barney, gleefully, making a dive for his inside pocket; then, as the other went into a fit of laughter, the joyful look faded into an expression of intense indignation, and Barney, with a curse, strode to the door. Haldiman sprang to his feet and grasped the offended man by the shoulders.

'None of that!' he cried. 'Come back, you villain! You are not going to offer me a fortune and then sneak off in that fashion. Sit down, Barney; sit down and go on with the pretty talk!'

'Oh, it's no use!' said the other, in tones of deep

dejection. 'I said I hadn't a friend in the world, and I haven't.'

'Bosh! You're harder to humour than a baby. If a man may not smile in his own room, where may he? I'm intensely interested, and want to know what crime I'm expected to commit. Never mind the money, but state your case.'

'The money is part of the case. I pay or I don't play.'

'Certainly. That's understood. I accept. Fire away!'

'Well, you know all the editors of the illustrated weeklies and magazines.'

'For my sins I do—alas!'

'Then, to come right to the point as between man and man, I want to buy a first-class critic, and the editor of a first-class illustrated periodical.'

'You mean you want to buy a going magazine?'

'I don't mean anything of the kind. I mean just what I say.'

'Then I don't quite understand you. Explain.'

'What I want is this: I want a first-class art-critic to write an article in a first-class periodical saying Barnard Hope is the greatest artist the world has ever seen.'

'Oh, is that all?'

'No, that's not all. I want the article superbly illustrated—in colour if possible—with reproductions of my chief paintings.'

'Ah! I wouldn't do that, Barney, if I were you. The pictures would be rather a give-away of the great critic's eulogy.'

'Yes, I knew you would say that. The obviousness of such a remark would commend itself to you. But you see I'm perfectly frank with you. Now, could you manage this for me? Remember, I don't care how much money I spend.'

Haldiman removed the black pipe from his

mouth, knocked the ashes out of it, and thoughtfully refilled it.

'Well, for brazen cheek, Barney,' he said at last, 'that proposal——'

'Yes, I know, I know, I know. But these things happen every day—or, not to exaggerate, let us say every second day. It is simply doing for me what Ruskin did for Turner. Turner painted away all his life; nobody recognized him, and he died in Chelsea. Now I'm living in Chelsea, and I want recognition during my life. Of course my Ruskin will come along after I'm dead; but, like the fellow in *The Mikado* who was to be executed, I won't be there to enjoy it. Things rarely happen at the right moment in this world, and my brazen proposal is merely to take events by the coat-collar and hurry them up a bit. You see what I mean? Besides, I'm infinitely greater than Turner, don't you know.'

Haldiman smoked and meditated for some moments; then he said—

'I'm not sure but the trick may be done, although I doubt if brutal barefaced bribery will do it. How would a magazine like *Our National Art* suit you?'

'Nothing could be better.'

'And would a French art-critic like Viellième be satisfactory?'

'Perfectly. What he says is taken for gospel all the world over.'

'Well, I happen to know that the editor of *Our National Art* has been trying for a year to get Viellième to write about English art; but the Frenchman won't come over to London, even for a day, at any price. Viellième is great as a writer, but greater still as a money-spender. I'll run over to Paris and sound him. You couldn't bribe the editor of *Our National Art*, but he will print anything Viellième will write for him. Now I know the Frenchman doesn't care what he writes for England,

although he is rather particular about what appears in Paris. He thinks there is no art in England.'

'He's right, too, as far as his knowledge goes; but he's never seen anything of mine.'

'Just so. Then, if Viellième agrees, you would be willing to send some of your immortal works over to Paris for his inspection?'

'All of them, my boy, all of them.'

'Then we'll look on that as settled. I'll do my best.'

'God bless you, my dear fellow! God bless you!' cried Barney with deep emotion, crushingly wringing the hand of the wincing man, whom he now declared to be his one friend on earth. He clattered noisily down the stairs like a stalwart trooper, sprang into the waiting hansom, and departed.

CHAPTER XXIX

MARSTON went to work with energy and singleness of purpose. Chance, or destiny, had placed him in exactly the position which he had long hoped to attain. At first there was little to be done but wait until the Union had recovered from the wounds received in the late fruitless struggle; nevertheless, while he waited, he planned and gradually developed the scheme which he hoped would revolutionize the labour of the world. He saw in the future one vast republic of workers—not bounded by nationality, but spreading over the entire earth—with its foothold wherever one man toiled with his hands to enrich another. He had no delusions regarding the immediate success of his project, and did not flatter himself that his ideas would spread with anything like the rapidity of the cholera, for example; but he hoped first to place the Union on a firm footing in England, and then, with a brilliantly successful strike—conducted as a general of genius conducts a battle—to show what might be done by a thoroughly well-organized force against a rich and powerful firm like that of Monkton and Hope. He looked forward to the time when every worker in England would be a member of the Union; after that he hoped to affiliate all the workers in all English-speaking countries; finally, the benighted foreigner would be

included. Then, when the whole was united like an electric installation in a city, the unfortunate capitalist who placed a finger on one point would receive the combined current of the entire system, and be destroyed in an instant. The equipment of the workers would be so complete that strikes would become fewer and fewer, and finally cease; just as war will cease when weapons of offence reach such a state of perfection that no nation will dare to pick a quarrel with another.

This great republic of labour would be divided into various states, and these states would be again subdivided into as many sections as experience showed to be most practicable. Each section would elect its secretary, the secretaries would elect a governor of the state, the governors would elect a president of the whole organization. Every official should be paid a salary, sufficient, even in the lesser offices, to support the incumbent and his family without the necessity of manual labour, so that each officer's whole time could be given for the benefit of the Union.

Marston gave much thought to the problem of reconciling deserved promotion with popular election, and, perhaps, if he had known more of the results of universal suffrage in a city like New York, he might have reconstructed his whole plan; but he had full belief in the adage that the voice of the people coincides with that of the Almighty, and so, perhaps, did not quite appreciate the practical difficulties which lay in wait for a scheme that looked beautiful on paper.

Early experience convinced him that he could hope for no active assistance from the men themselves; and he promptly eliminated that factor from his calculations. He thought of beginning his fight with an educational campaign, using in this way the time which must elapse before the treasury of the Union was replenished; but he found that he could never get more than half a dozen of the men together at one

time, and those who came to the meetings which he called seemed to take but slight interest in what he had to say. This did not discourage him, as he was, in a measure, prepared for the indifference he met; and he remembered that his great model, Napoleon, took no one into his confidence. Napoleon struck unexpectedly—struck quick and struck hard—and Marston resolved to do the same the moment he had the power. Failing to interest the men collectively in the desirability of a close and universal Union, Marston tried to win their separate confidence; but he soon discovered that in attempting this he was travelling along a dangerous road. He was amazed to find that there existed a latent sullen opposition to him; that many of the men seemed to regret the generous impulse which had caused them to place him where he was. They could not see what he did to earn the money he received; some thought they were giving him too much, as he had no work to do; and more than one advised him to keep quiet and leave the men alone, to know when he was well off, and not to turn the thoughts of the members to the fact that they were supporting him in idleness and luxury.

Marston resolved to let nothing stand in the way of success. He believed he could more than earn any salary they gave him, and no man in London had a greater incentive for making and accumulating money than he had; nevertheless, he desired above all things to hold the good opinion of the men and to convince them that he was working for them and not for himself. He realized that alone he was powerless, but with their united support he was invincible.

He called a meeting to reconsider the salary of the secretary, and that meeting was well attended; for the subject to be discussed had more interest than his abandoned educational campaign, the purpose of which was to teach them the principles of combination.

Most of the men thought him a fool in not knowing his own good luck.

Marston, addressing them, said that his whole object in taking the secretaryship was to bring about an amalgamation of labour which would make the results of future strikes a certainty. All the rights mankind possessed had been won by battle; but the battles must be successful, and success was only possible when there was no dissension in the camp. He frankly stated that he had learned there was some dissatisfaction because he got more money than was earned by many who laboured in the ranks, and he had made an estimate of how little he could live upon, which was less than the poorest paid man at the Works received. He was willing to accept this sum, and would devote his whole time and energy to the cause of labour as faithfully as if he were given ten times the amount.

Gibbons, who had at last found employment in the neighbourhood, here rose to his feet. He said he thought the office of secretary could be still more economically filled. He was sure they had men among them, now in employ, who would act as secretary without salary from the Union, and perform all the duties quite acceptably to the majority of the men.

'Why didn't you propose that when you were secretary yourself, Gibbons?' asked one of the audience, at which there was some laughter.

'I did not do so because I was at that time out of work,' replied Gibbons, warming to his theme. 'I don't wish to say a word against the present secretary, but I would like to ask him a question or two. He seemed once of opinion that Sartwell was a very shrewd, far-seeing man. I would like to know, Mr. Marston, if you are still of that opinion?'

'I am,' answered Marston.

'Then can you explain to the meeting why Sartwell has taken no further steps to cripple the Union,

which we all know he desired to smash, and in fact did threaten to smash? Why did he not, in taking back the men, make it a condition that they should leave the Union?'

'How should I know? I may say, however, that I believe Sartwell to be an essentially just man, although he may be mistaken in some things, and I don't think he would interfere with the personal liberty of the workmen.'

'It is very generous of the secretary of our Union to speak well of the honesty of a man who looted our treasury, and we won't forget that Sartwell has at least one friend among us. It is a little remarkable that this one friend should have been the only man, of all Sartwell's people, who was suddenly dismissed, and, as far as we know, without cause. One more question, Mr. Marston. Do you know why Sartwell discharged you?'

Marston was silent, the colour rising in his face.

'Of course,' continued Gibbons, calmly, 'you are not compelled to answer. I am merely asking what many of us have been thinking. You either know, or you do not. You have called this meeting, and I think you should have the courtesy to answer any question—any reasonable question—asked you. You say you want the support of the men, whose servant you are. That is a reasonable desire; but to bestow such confidence we must have full knowledge of our man. I ask for the second time, do you know why Sartwell discharged you?'

'I do.'

'Why?'

'On account of a personal quarrel between him and me with which this meeting has nothing to do.'

'Oh, indeed! Then you had personal dealings with the man we were fighting, which you would prefer us to know nothing about. I will not press for a more specific answer. No man is bound to incrimi-

nate himself. I have given Mr. Marston a chance to explain certain obscure points which have puzzled some of us, and I think the answers wrung from him, with only too evident reluctance, have not bettered his position, nor made any thinking man among us the more ready to bestow that confidence which our secretary seems so much to desire. I would like now to call your attention to one or two points. Rightly or wrongly, the committee with which I acted had grave doubts of the loyalty of Mr. Marston during our late contest. Before the strike began, he himself admitted that he had been closeted with Sartwell, and we know that while the fight was on, he was the only man who had a conference with the enemy, and the only man who was able to tell us of the enemy's plans—unfortunately when it was too late to make that knowledge useful to us. Whenever there was a crisis we found Mr. Marston eloquent on the side of giving in—all through affection for the men, of course. I am making no accusations; I am merely stating facts that Mr. Marston himself admits, and if I am mistaken in anything I say, the young man is here to set me right. These facts had a certain influence with the committee, causing a distrust to arise in their minds—a feeling that Mr. Marston, for some reason, was more anxious to please Sartwell than to see his fellow-workers win. Now, what happens? The strike ends, and we are surprised to see that the only man dismissed is Mr. Marston. The next move is that the young man is made secretary of the Union by a practically unanimous vote. I say that vote was to the credit of the men, and, had I been present, I would have voted for Mr. Marston. But let us look into the matter a little closer. Who agitated the election of our new secretary? I now come to a difficult point, and I want to make myself perfectly clear, and to speak with absolute justice. "Say no ill of the dead" is a noble motto, and I have nothing

but good to say of that hero, Braunt. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."'

There was tremendous cheering at this quotation, and it was some time before Gibbons could proceed. Marston sat silent in his chair, with the helpless feeling of a criminal in the dock. He felt the chain of circumstance tightening around him.

'Braunt was a hero in death and a hero in life. He was frankly and honestly against us from the first, and he fought us with an uprightness which I wish Sartwell had emulated. He took no strike pay, and used language against us which I hope has been forgotten, and which I know has been forgiven. There was nothing underhand in his opposition, and he broke the back of the strike by hitting from the shoulder when we had reached the desperation of utter exhaustion. But, while giving full credit to the splendid character of Braunt, we must not forget that he was throughout our staunch opponent, and that it was he who elected Mr. Marston secretary of this Union.

'Now, I am a plain man, who does not think himself any better than the average. I do not look for angels with wings among my fellow-workers; I look for plain, everyday motives when trying to trace cause back from effect. It is not natural for a man to beg for a reduction of his screw unless that man is an angel, or unless there is some hidden cause for his doing so. We strike to increase our wages, and I have never heard of a deputation of working-men waiting on an employer to ask for a reduction. Mr. Marston does what we know to be most unusual, and what we believe to be unnatural. What is his motive? Who is going to make up the deficiency in his salary? These are questions for you to answer. I have tried to state nothing but facts, and no statement I have made has been contradicted. The result is a chain of

circumstantial evidence which would convict a man in any court in the land. Men have been hanged on evidence less complete.'

Gibbons sat down amidst universal applause. Marston rose to his feet slowly. He knew that the meeting was solidly against him, and that he had to bring it round in his favour or lose the race before it began. There flashed through his mind the sentence, 'It is not the capitalist who will defeat you, but the men you are fighting for.' He remembered Braunt's utter lack of faith in the rope of sand. Then he spoke.

'I have listened attentively to what has been said, and I have listened without interruption because I have sat spellbound by the cleverness of the speech, admiring its force and logic, and deeply regretting the fact that I have not the eloquence and gifts of the speaker who has just sat down. Two things are at this moment uppermost in my mind. First, that if some stranger were in my place, and I were sitting among you, I should believe him guilty. Second, there has come over me a feeling of sympathy with any man who has ever been condemned on circumstantial evidence. I know now, as I never did before, that many a poor wretch has gone to an undeserved death. Gibbons, you have throughout referred to me as *Mr.* Marston. I disclaim the "Mr.," as doubtless you do, so I shall call you plain Gibbons. Gibbons, you have defeated me. The meeting I have called together is against me and for you.'

There were cries of dissent at this.

'Oh yes, it is. I will prove it in a minute by putting it to vote, if you like.'

'Hold on!' cried Gibbons; 'that is not fair. I protest against a vote being taken after such a declaration.'

'I am going to take no unfair advantage, and only spoke of a vote because my assertion seemed to be doubted. Now, Gibbons, you asked me several ques-

tions; I claim the right to put a few to you, and I charge you to answer as honestly as if you were on oath. Do you actually believe that I am in the pay of Sartwell?'

'I didn't say so.'

'Do you believe I am?'

'Yes, I do.'

'What object could Sartwell have in buying me?'

'Oh, that's too self-evident. If he controls you he controls the action of the Union.'

'Please explain how. No action can be taken without a majority vote.'

'That's it exactly. That's why you are begging for our confidence and support, so that when the time comes you can deliver to Sartwell what he pays for.'

'I see. Did Sartwell ever offer to buy you?'

'He never did. He knew better.'

'Did you ever offer to sell yourself to Sartwell?'

'What's that? What do you mean?'

'I'll put the question in another way. Did you write a private letter to Sartwell a few days before the strike ended?'

Gibbons rose to his feet in such evident confusion that several of the crowd laughed, and all were in a state of tense excitement. This was the kind of thing they liked. Marston was carrying the war into Africa.

'What are you accusing me of?' cried Gibbons.

'Like yourself, I am making no accusations. Did you send such a letter or not?'

'As leader of the strike I may have done so.'

'No, no. Answer, yes or no.'

'Let me explain. I say——'

'First answer the question, Gibbons.'

'I refuse to be coerced in this manner. I am willing to answer anything, but I must be allowed to answer in my own way.'

'No man is bound to incriminate himself, Gibbons, as you remarked a while ago. Since we cannot get an answer to that question, I will ask another. Will you give me permission to read your Sartwell letter to this meeting?'

Gibbons was dumbfounded, and forgot entirely, in his agitation, that the letter had been returned to him, remembering only that its contents were not for the general public. His attitude was that of conscious guilt.

'Read it, read it!' cried the crowd, and the shouts seemed to rouse Gibbons to a sense of the situation.

'I protest against the reading of a private letter in public,' he stammered.

'And quite right, too,' said Marston. 'I protested against the public discussion of a private quarrel, and the protest was held against me. Now I have no desire to push my opponent to the wall, and I will say at once that the letter in question may be as innocent as "Mary had a little lamb." I never read it and never saw it. I heard of it through a chance remark, but I know nothing of its contents. You see now how easy it is to ask a question which a man may hesitate to answer, and you see of how little value circumstantial evidence is. Now, Gibbons, we are quits, and I am willing to let bygones be bygones if you are. I give you my word—and that is all I have to offer, for I'm the poorest among you—that I am not in the pay of any one on earth except yourselves. I swear to you that I have only one object in view, and that is the bettering of our condition. All I ask is fair play. Perhaps I can't do what I think I can, but I want to try. If I fail, then let the next man come on and have his try, and he will have no more earnest supporter than I will be. With dissension in our ranks, nothing can be done; so I want the backing of every man in the Union, and more especially of the man who thinks I have been a traitor—which

I declare to him and to you I was not. Now, Gibbons, this has been an open question-and-answer meeting. There has been a free-for-all give and take here to-night. I have a last question to ask you: are you going to be my friend or my enemy?'

There were cries of 'Toe the mark, Gibbons!' 'Time!' 'Speak up, my boy!' 'Show your hand, Gibbons!'

Gibbons, who had now recovered his equanimity, rose to his feet, and said: 'Fellow-workmen, I move that Marston be confirmed in his secretaryship of the Union, and I hope the vote will be unanimous. We will give him what he asks—a fair chance—and as long as he deals squarely with us, we will deal squarely with him. As far as my friendship or enmity is concerned, I may say that I'm a friend to any one who is loyal to the cause, and an enemy to those who are against it. I think that is all that can be asked of me or any other man present.'

The motion was seconded and carried unanimously, and the object for which the meeting was convened was lost sight of entirely.

Marston went on with his work of organization, and met with much encouragement from the societies with which he entered into correspondence. Whatever opposition existed against him in his own Union, it at least did not show itself openly; but Marston did not make the mistake of believing that Gibbons was his friend.

CHAPTER XXX

INGENIOUS persons have shown that a five-pound note rightly guided will liquidate an almost unlimited amount of liability. Let it be granted, says the mathematician, that *A* owes *B*, *B* owes *C*, *C* owes *D*, and *D* owes *A*—one hundred shillings in each case. *A* gives a five-pound note to *B*, who gives it to *C*, who gives it to *D*, who gives it to *A*. The peregrinations of the same note wipes out twenty pounds of debt, and *A* has the original bit of paper he started with.

In like manner a clever person can bestow a great favour upon a friend and at the same time accommodate several others, leaving all under obligations to him; while a blunderer, instead of making everybody happy, would have accomplished nothing beyond creating enemies for himself.

The shrewd Haldiman, bringing some promised work to the editor of *Our National Art*, casually mentioned that Barnard Hope had been invited to send some of his paintings to Paris.

'What! Do you mean the Chelsea giant? Why, that ass doesn't understand the rudiments of drawing; and as for colour—great heavens! there isn't a pavement chalk-artist who is not his superior.'

Haldiman looked puzzled; then he said with some hesitation—

'I confess I used to think that; but of course we

studied together in Paris, and we students always under-estimate each other. There is something in Barney's paintings which I don't pretend to understand.'

'Understand! Bosh! There's nothing in them but the vilest and most ignorant smearing ever put upon canvas.'

'Then how do you account for the fact that some of the most advanced critics are beginning to consider Barney seriously, as a new factor in the art world?'

'I hadn't heard of it. Who, for instance?'

'Well, I'm told that Viellième simply raves over his work—says it's a distinctive new note, and that Barney is the only original genius England has ever produced.'

'You amaze me! It can't be true! Whatever any one may say of Viellième's moral nature, it can't be denied that he knows a picture when he sees one.'

'Of course; I'm simply repeating what I have heard. As I say, I don't admire Barney's work myself. However, I'm just off for Paris, and I'll find out for you, on the quiet, just what Viellième thinks. If Barney is a coming man you'd want to know it, and at least give the first inkling of the new craze, if there is to be one, wouldn't you?'

'Certainly. But I can't believe it!'

'I'm not sure that I ought to mention it, but I know that a number of Barney's paintings are going over to France, and I believe especially for Viellième's inspection.'

'I say, Haldiman, just find out for me all you can, will you? It seems incredible! Still, art is full of surprises, and I should like to know. If it is true, try to induce Viellième to write an article on the new era in art for me.'

'Would you print an article on Barney, if I get Viellième to write it? I thought you didn't care for Barney's work.'

'I don't, but I'll gladly print anything Viellième will sign. Of course, among the different schools I endeavour to maintain absolute impartiality. I believe in letting every side be heard.'

'Well, I'll do my best.'

'Thanks, Haldiman. I'll be very much obliged to you, and any expense you——'

'Oh, don't mention it. I'm going to Paris anyhow, so there won't be any extra expense.'

The article, marvellously illustrated, appeared in due course. The result quite justified Barney's expectations and expenditure, and the Barnard Hope boom raged up and down the land. He was interviewed, and photographed, and paragraphed. For a time it was hardly possible to pick up a sixpenny illustrated weekly without seeing the latest photograph of Barney in it, for the young man developed a genius for posing before a camera that would have done credit to our greatest actor. The picture representing him standing with arms folded across his breast, a stern commanding expression upon his countenance, was the one perhaps most sought after by young ladies, although another in which he looked like Rembrandt was also very popular. Exhibitors begged for his paintings, nabobs bought them, and nobody understood them, which fact made the boom a permanency. Real painters looked at each other in amazement, and asked, 'What is this world coming to?'—a question often propounded and never adequately answered.

His great fame did not change Barney a particle; he was the same hail-fellow he had always been, and an invitation to his 'At Home' became a distinction. America was especially lavish in its purchases of his work, and he was offered fabulous sums to go there and lecture. The adulation he received would have turned the head of almost any man; but it had little

effect on him, because he never had the slightest misgiving that his great reputation was entirely undeserved, and he had looked upon himself as the foremost man of the age long before the world had recognized the fact. He received letters from all parts of the country, whose writers, in most gushing phrases, said that they had been privileged to look upon his work at such and such an exhibition, and they hoped to live better and nobler lives in consequence. Some of these epistles affected Barney almost to tears; and he read them to his friends, humbly thankful that the gift of bestowing such pleasure, and wielding such an influence for good upon his fellow-creatures, had been granted to him.

Imitators arose, of course, but they did little to tarnish his reputation; for, as Haldiman had said, there was only one Barney, and it is never given to two men in any one generation to paint as badly as Barney did. Art-critics castigated the imitators mercilessly, and were in the habit of saying that if Barnard Hope had not lived such and such a picture would not have been painted—which statement was probably quite true.

Barney's people were naturally very proud of him. His father had always admired him with the intense admiration which a very little man has for a very big relative; his mother referred to him as, 'My son, Barnard Hope, the celebrated painter.'

To all appearances Barney was a man greatly to be envied, but, alas! how little does the public know the inner life of even its greatest favourite! All may be fair to outward view, while within sits brooding care. Barney had a secret trouble which he confided to no one, and it caused him serious mental dissatisfaction. He had told Edna Sartwell that she had blighted his life, and he fully believed this at the time he made the gloomy statement. He sombrely pictured himself

in the future as a disappointed man—successful, perhaps, but cynically bitter with existence, living the life of a recluse, and cherishing his broken heart. As the victim of a hopeless passion, he pitied himself; and yet took a melancholy pleasure in ruminating over the wreck of what might have been a joyful career. To his dismay he found it impossible to live up to this ideal. The forced laugh; the pessimistic smile; the dark mantle of a great reserve which he hoped to fold around himself, did not come natural to him, and he was continually backsliding into being his own hilarious boisterous self, and having a good time, when he should have been moping alone over an aching void. Above all things he expected himself to forswear ladies' society, and never again indulge in the light, flippant, and complimentary talk in which he had been an acknowledged master; but it grieved him to discover that he still took a keen delight in their presence, while they, poor dears! unblushingly adored Barney as they had always done. His arrival in any room immediately brightened the occasion, and he was by all odds the most popular young man in his set. His failure in the tragic rôle he had marked out for himself at first worried Barney, and led him to suspect that he was not so deep as he had imagined; but this disquieting thought gave way under his ultimate realization that the taciturn recluse of fiction and the drama was merely a melancholy humbug who did not exist in real life. This comforting discovery did much to place Barney once more on good terms with himself, and by-and-by he abandoned the attempt to pose as the stricken victim of woman's inappreciation, and was once more the genial host and the welcome guest.

As time went on, and his fame continued to spread, he fell more and more under the gentle influence of Lady Mary Fanshaw, who was a modest, refined, and

altogether charming girl. She had an unbounded admiration for Barney's strength and manliness; and his many deeds of kindness and lavish generosity, which he himself was at no particular pains to conceal, won her deep regard. She did not pretend to understand his paintings, but was quite willing to believe what appeared to be the universal estimate, that they were works of the very highest genius.

In the company of Lady Mary, Barney's heroic determination to lead a monastic life became fainter and fainter. When Barney saw whither he was drifting, he held a serious consultation with himself. Six months had elapsed since the episode at Eastbourne, and this half-year had been the most fateful in his whole existence. Even though there was a lingering disappointment over the now self-admitted fact that his life had not been wrecked, yet he felt he owed it to his dignity not to propose to Lady Mary until a year at least had intervened between the two matrimonial excursions. To propose sooner would be to admit that he did not know his own mind—and he particularly prided himself on his strength of mind. An action which may be the outcome of indecent haste if taken within six months of an occurrence, may be the epitome of calm deliberation in twelve. Instances are on record where a man's most cherished political convictions have changed completely within a year; and a grateful country has testified its appreciation of the honesty of the transformation by bestowing a peerage or a knighthood upon the man. Why, then, should not a great painter be deeply in love with two delightful girls, if a reasonable interval separated the declarations of affection? Barney said to himself that it was undoubtedly wrong to be in love with two or more at the same time, and he had to admit that in former days he had come dangerously near that complicated condition; but he was young at the time, and youth

is an excuse which covers a multitude of errors. 'This day six months,' said Barney, definitely, 'I shall ask Lady Mary to be my wife.' Having thus reached finality in his meditations, he felt that sense of satisfaction which a man always experiences when a perplexing problem is authoritatively settled one way or another. Nothing is so demoralizing as indecision. Hitherto he had been almost afraid to meet Lady Mary, much as he enjoyed her companionship; but now there was no reason why he should hold aloof from her. Therefore, having written down the date on which the momentous proposal was to take place, he arose with an overflowing exuberance of spirits, and resolved to celebrate his decision by driving down to the pretty Surrey village near which Lady Mary's father lived. The tandem was a thing of the past. He found that the sight of it brought up painful recollections of Eastbourne; so he sold it, and acquired a most stylish four-wheeled vehicle which he called his 'growler,' drawn by two spirited black horses. He spoke to his friends apologetically about his growler, and said it gave no particular scope for a man's driving powers, but would serve until the coach which he had ordered from the most noted builders in London was finished. A four-in-hand, he held, was the only thing a man could drive with credit to himself and satisfaction to all beholders. So with the black pair dancing before him, held by a firm hand, he rattled across Chelsea Bridge, and made for the interior of Surrey.

CHAPTER XXXI

IT is a pleasant thing on a beautiful day to drive through Surrey lanes, with a fine pair of horses in front and a liveried menial with folded arms on the seat behind. Barney, who knew the country well, chose the by-roads rather than the main thoroughfares; for he had a keen love of nature and an appreciation of landscape, as became a man who had placed on canvas so many amazing reproductions of natural scenery.

As he neared his destination he turned into the particular lane which he knew to be Lady Mary's favourite walk, and he kept a sharp look-out ahead, hoping to descry the girl in the distance. He also looked at his watch, and slowed the horses when he saw that he had arrived at the head of the lane somewhat in advance of the time he had set for himself. Barney was above all things a practical man, and he knew that, outside the drama, coincidences rarely happened unless they were touched up a bit; so before leaving Chelsea he took the precaution of telegraphing to Lady Mary, informing her that at a certain hour he would be at the head of the lane, and that if he met there any one who lived in the neighbourhood who would extend to him a cordial invitation to visit a certain country house, he would accept with all the heartfelt gratitude of a homeless

man perambulating the country with two horses and a wagon. It was one of Barney's habits seldom to write a letter, and to depend almost entirely on the telegraph as a means of communication with his fellows. He delighted in sending a friend a ten-page telegram on some perfectly trivial subject, and to the numerous people all over the country who now wrote to him asking for his autograph, he invariably sent it by postal telegraph, explaining in the message that, as he never wrote letters, any signature of his at the end of an epistle was sure to be a forgery, and no autographs were genuine unless they came by wire. Barney's electrical autographs now bring good prices at auction sales.

As he entered the lane, then, he looked ahead for the fulfilment of the coincidence which he had prearranged; and was presently rewarded by seeing the fine figure of the girl coming towards him, an ebony stick in her hand, and three big dogs following her. Barney threw the reins to his man, told him to drive on, and sprang down.

The girl's cheeks were as rosy as the dawn, either from exercise in the pure air or from the pleasure of meeting him.

After greeting her, he cried—

'You got my telegram, then?'

'Yes. Have you any money left after sending it?'

'Oh, I'm in funds to-day. I sold a picture for a thousand pounds yesterday to a Chicago man. They know how to buy, those Western fellows! He took one of the burnt-umber night scenes, made me sign my name on it in scarlet letters three inches long, and then told me with a chuckle, after it was done, that he would have given a couple of hundred extra for the signature if I had held out. Thus are we poor artists imposed upon! Still, the scarlet lettering completely killed the half-tones of the painting, and ruined it, in my opinion; but he said it was the signature he

wanted, so we are both satisfied. He was a perfectly frank heathen: said he could buy better paintings in Chicago for five dollars each, with a discount off if he took a quantity, but that people over there wouldn't have the work of the native artists at any price. He proudly asserted that he knew nothing about art himself—tinned goods were in his line. I said I supposed that was all right as long as the goods brought in the tin, and he replied that that was what he was after.'

'Well, I'm sure I congratulate you.'

'Me? Now, Lady Mary, I call that hard lines. I thought you were a friend of mine—I did, indeed.'

'I am. May I not congratulate you on selling a picture?'

'No, your ladyship; no, ma'am! But you might congratulate the Chicago man. I feel that he did me out of two hundred. Oh, he's got a bargain, and he knows it! I tell you what it is, my pictures are getting so expensive that I am beginning to realize it is reckless extravagance for me to have so many of them hanging in my studio. It looks like ostentation, and I hate that. That's why I took the thousand, merely to get rid of it.'

'Were you long in painting it?'

'Yes, a good while. Of course I can't tell just how long, for one does not do a masterpiece like that right off the reel, don't you know. I suppose I must have spent as much as six hours on it, off and on. You see, you have to wait until the groundwork dries before you can go on with the rest. First, with a big brush, I covered the whole of the canvas with burnt umber, and then let it dry. That's night, as it would appear if there were no lights anywhere. Then I put in my high lights—little dabs of white paint. That seems easy, but I tell you it requires genius. Then, if there is water, even though unseen to the general eye, one has to put in little wabbly lines of grey paint

under the dots of high light, and there you are, don't you know. It all seems simple enough to talk about, and plenty of fellows are trying it, now I have shown them the way; but somehow they don't hit it off, don't you know. But sink the shop in a Surrey lane; I hate talking shop, anyhow! Now, am I going to get my invitation, or am I not?'

'Of course you are. My father is most anxious to meet you.'

'That's very nice of him. But, I say, Lady Mary——'

The young man stopped suddenly, and the girl looked up at him. She read in his eyes such honest, undisguised admiration of herself, that she dropped her own, and blushed still more rosily.

'What is it?' she asked. 'Have you forgotten something?'

'No,' he said, eagerly, taking the unresisting fingers of her two hands in his, as they stood there. 'No, I have just remembered. I ought to have something to say to your father, don't you know. We can't talk about painting, and——well, Mary, we should have some topic of vital interest to discuss, shouldn't we?'

The girl laughed a little, but did not reply. The three dogs stood some distance off, regarding the pair with suspicion; and a low growl from one of them indicated that the situation was unusual and must not be carried too far.

'What shall I say to him, Mary?' cried the young man, with a tender thrill in his deep voice. 'May I tell him that I care more for his daughter than for any one else in the world? May I?'

The girl made no attempt to withdraw her hands, nor did she do more than give him one swift, brief glance.

'If it is true,' she murmured, 'I see no reason why you should not tell him so.'

'True!' cried Barney, fervently. 'There's nothing

on earth so true, Mary, my darling, as that I love you! And do you—do you care in the least for a big blundering fellow like me?'

'Always, always!' said Lady Mary. 'Ever since I first met you. And long before the world recognized your genius, Barney, I did.'

The jubilant young man, suddenly abandoning the hand that was thus promised him, clasped the girl to him and kissed her. It is a remarkable thing that a man often attains celebrity for doing something which hundreds of others can do better, while the world remains ignorant of performances actually entitled to fame. As Barney threw one arm round Lady Mary's waist, he saw, out of the corner of his eye, the big dog about to spring at his throat. Yet the young man kissed the girl as tenderly and as gently as if nothing particular were happening on the other side of him; and Lady Mary, closing her eyes for the moment, rested her head against his breast and breathed a deep sigh of contentment. She was awakened from her momentary dream by savage, mouthing growls, and, remembering the dogs, jumped back in alarm. With rigid muscles Barney was holding at arm's length, his strong hand grasping the collar, a brute only slightly smaller than a pony, whose angry fangs were tearing at his coat-sleeve. The other two dogs looked on, snarling, but apparently waiting for their mistress to give the word for attack. The girl shrieked at the sight.

'Down, Nero, down!' she cried. 'How dare you, sir!'

'Oh, it's all right,' said Barney, nonchalantly. 'Don't scold him. "'Tis his nature, too," don't you know. He'll find out two things in about a minute: first, and most important, that I'm going to be one of the family; and second, that he's met his match. I say, Mary, this wouldn't be a bad scene for the Aquarium, don't you know—Samson defying the lightning, or

was it Ajax? I never can remember those classical allusions.'

'Down, sir!' commanded the girl. 'Come here and apologize!'

Barney relaxed his grasp on the collar, and the huge dog cringed up to Lady Mary with a most crestfallen air. It was evident that, although he deferred to his mistress's authority, he was still unshaken in his opinion that such goings-on as he had just beheld were entirely out of order; and although he humbly licked the girl's hand, he cast side-looks at Barney which were anything but friendly, yet the truculent glance was mitigated by that respect for proven strength which one strong animal feels when he meets a stronger. The girl, crouching, patted his shaggy coat, and, alternately scolding and petting him, explained the situation as well as she could, beseeching Nero to treat Barney as a friend.

When she stood up again—blessed are the peacemakers!—Barney said—

'Let's see if he understands.'

'Now, Barney,' cried the girl, 'you must behave yourself! You can't tell who might come into view any moment.'

'We'll risk the chance comer—purely for the dog's benefit, you know, Mary.'

The big dog made no move this time; but his angry eye lighted up with a dangerous lurid gleam, and the corners of his heavy lips quivered, showing the teeth.

'Oh, it's a case of pure jealousy,' said Barney. 'I can see that. Nero and I never can be friends.'

They walked together slowly down the lane, the dogs in front. Nero seemed exceedingly dejected, and stalked along with offended dignity, taking little notice of the other two dogs; while these, with a levity which met with his sullen disapproval—indicated now and then by deep, low growls of rebuke—

futilely chased imaginary rabbits by the hedge-rows, tumbling over each other in their frivolous, headlong career.

'Do you know, Mary, I think we should join hands and swing our arms as we walk along. I want to shout and whoop like a Red Indian—and yet calm reflection tells me that it isn't good form. I believe I'm hopelessly plebeian, and yearn for a Whitechapel expression of my happiness. If I weren't afraid of the dog—that is, morally afraid, for I can throttle him physically—I'd pull the pin out of that most fetching hat of yours, and put the hat on my own head, giving you mine. Actually, I'd like to dance, don't you know!'

The girl laughed.

'I shouldn't mind a dance myself,' she said.

'Oh, then it's all right! I was beginning to fear that I had a costermonger among my ancestors; but, if you're not shocked, I may, for all I know, be descended from the Conqueror.'

'Well, if you want to shout, do it now; for I want you to be very circumspect and proper when we walk up the avenue.'

Barney did not shout, but he placed his arm round her, and—and felt that it was most delightful to be thus taken in charge and told how to behave.

CHAPTER XXXII

IT was Barney's habit, now that money flowed in upon him, to deal liberally with his cabmen. He would hand to the man a sovereign, if there happened to be one loose in his waistcoat pocket, and say to him—

'Now I may need you only twenty minutes, or I may need you all the afternoon; but I want you to feel happy while you're driving me, don't you know, so here's all I'm going to give you, and I wish to have no dispute about fares at the end of the journey.'

There never was any dispute, and Barney was extremely popular with the driving fraternity.

When the date of the wedding was fixed, Barney, on his return to London, took a cab at two sovereigns, in honour of the forthcoming event. He said to himself that he could not give less and retain his self-respect, as he intended using the cab in completing the necessary arrangements for the ceremony. He drove first to the residence of the clergyman who was in charge of St. Martyrs'-in-the-East; for he had determined that the marriage should take place in this church, because it was the nearest sacred building to his father's Works, and was surrounded by a population largely in the employ of the firm, directly or indirectly. Besides this, Barney took a particular

delight in the thought that all the newspapers would be compelled to send representatives to this unfashionable locality; for the wedding would be a notable one, and he was now so famous that should he marry or die in the most unfrequented spot in the British Isles, his doing so would for ever bestow distinction on the place.

The genial old clergyman was excessively impressed by the fact that so celebrated a man chose St. Martyrs' for such an important ceremony.

'Of course,' said Barney, airily, 'I shall have a bishop or two to assist you, and perhaps a few lesser dignitaries. If you will just give me the names of any you prefer, I shall put myself into communication with them.'

'You mean that I shall assist the bishop,' protested the reverend gentleman, mildly. 'His Lordship, as of course you know, takes precedence.'

'Oh, well, you'll arrange all that among yourselves. I don't understand these matters, you know: I was never married before, and I leave every detail in the hands of those who are experienced. What I wish is, to have everything well done, regardless of expense. If you will allow me, I would like to send you a cheque for a thousand pounds, to be distributed among the poor, don't you know, and that sort of thing, in honour of the occasion. I suppose it can be managed.'

'We shall be very grateful indeed for it. A plethora of money has never been one of the obstacles with which we have had to contend in this parish.'

'Then that 's all right. Now, have you seen your organist recently? What's his name? It has slipped my memory for the moment.'

'Langly. I am sorry to say that he has not been at all well lately. Not ill, exactly, for he has been able to attend to his duties, but still far from well. I think he needs some one to look after him. He is an

absent-minded man—a dreamer—and I fear that he neglects himself.'

'I have tried to help him,' said Barney; 'but he shrinks from assistance of any kind as if it were infectious. He never will call on me, and I have had so many demands on my time this while back that I have not looked him up, as I intended to do. Could you give me his address? I had it once, but I've mislaid it.'

'He lives in wretched quarters—No. 3 Rose Garden Court, off Light Street. I don't think he would like you to call upon him. It would be better to write. It is very difficult to do anything for him, as you say, except indirectly. When I visited him, on hearing that he was not well, I could see that my presence discomposed him.'

'I wanted to speak to you about helping him indirectly. You all appreciate his abilities, of course.'

'Oh yes.'

'And yet, as you say, you are not a rich parish. Now here is a cheque for a hundred pounds. I would make it more, but that would arouse his suspicions, very likely. Would you take this, and increase his salary by that much yearly?—I will send a similar cheque once a year—and put it to him that the increase is because of the general admiration there is felt for—well, you know what I mean. So that he will be encouraged, don't you know.'

'It is very generous of you, Mr. Hope, and I shall see that your wishes are carried out.'

When the interview with the kindly vicar was finished, Barney jumped into his hansom and drove to Light Street. It was impossible to take the cab into Rose Garden Court; so Barney, securing, as guide, one of the numerous ragged urchins who thronged the place, made his way up the rickety stairs and knocked at Langly's door. A faint voice from within told him to enter, and on going in, Barney saw the organist

sitting on the bed. Langly had evidently been lying down, and now, with noticeable difficulty, sat up to greet his unexpected visitor. Thin as he had been when Barney saw him last, he was still thinner now, and a ghastly pallor overspread his face.

'I say, old man!' cried Barney, stopping short. 'You're not looking first-rate, don't you know. Have you been ill?'

'I've not been well, but I'm better now, thank you,' replied Langly, a shadow that would have been a flush in a healthy man coming over his cheeks. Clearly he did not like the intrusion; and Barney, remembering the vicar's words, saw that.

'Now, Langly,' he said, 'you mustn't mind my coming in this unceremonious way, because I'm here to beg a great favour of you. I'm the most dependent man on my friends that there is in all London—I am, and that's a fact. It seems to me I spend my time getting other fellows to do things for me, and they do them, too, by Jove! in the most kindly way. This is a very accommodating, indulgent world, don't you know. Now you just lie down again—I see I've disturbed you—I'm always disturbing somebody—and let me talk to you like a favourite uncle. I'm going to be married, Langly!—what do you think of that? And I'll bet you a sixpence you can't tell me where.'

Langly, who still sat on the edge of his bed, ignoring Barney's command, smiled wanly and shook his head.

'I knew you couldn't. Well, the ceremony is to be performed with great *éclat*, as the papers say, at St. Martyrs'-in-the-East. First time old St. Marts. has ever seen a fashionable wedding, I venture to affirm. I have just been to see the vicar, arranging all the details. What a nice old man he is!—and I say, Langly, you ought to have heard him praise you and your music! It's very pleasing to be appreciated—I like it myself.'

Langly, in spite of his pallor, actually blushed at this, but said nothing.

'Now, that brings us to the music on the wedding-day—and that's why I'm here. You will play the organ, of course.'

'I shall do my best,' murmured Langly.

'There is nothing better than that. But here is what I want, and I know it's a great favour I'm asking. I want you to compose a wedding-march for us. I'll have it published afterwards, and I know, when you see the bride, you won't need any begging from me to get you to dedicate it to her.'

'I'm afraid——' began the organist.

'Oh no, you're not,' interrupted Barney. 'You are such a modest fellow, Langly, I knew you'd be full of excuses; but I'm not going to let you off. I've set my heart on having a special wedding-march. Any pair of fools can be married to Mendelssohn, don't you know; but we want something all our own. It isn't as if a fellow were married every day, you know.'

'I was going to say that I feel hardly equal—I don't think I could do justice—but there is a march I composed about a year ago; it has never been played or heard by any one but myself. If you liked it——'

'Of course I'll like it. That will be the very thing.'

'I would compose one for you, but I am sure I could do nothing so good as that, and I want to give you my best.'

'I'm sure you do. So that's all settled. Now, Langly, here comes in the uncle talk. I told you I was going to talk to you like an uncle, you know. You must get out of this hole, and you must get out now. It's enough to kill the strongest man to stay in this place. I've got a hansom waiting in the street; so come with me and we'll search for a decent pair of

rooms with a motherly old woman to look after you.'

Langly was plainly embarrassed. At last he stammered—

'I can't afford a better place than this. I know it may not seem very comfortable to you, but it's all I really need.'

'Afford it! Of course you can afford a better place. Oh, I had forgotten. They haven't told you, then?'

'Told me what?'

'Well, I don't know that I should mention it. The fact is (it all came out quite incidentally when I was talking to the vicar—I told you he was saying nice things about you!), I imagine they're preparing a little surprise for you; so never say I spoke of it. I don't like surprises myself. I always tell the boys that if they've any surprises for me, to let me know in advance, so that I may prepare the proper expression of countenance. What I don't like about a surprise is to have it sprung on me without being told of it beforehand. Well, as I said, I shouldn't mention this; but the churchwardens and the vicar and a number of the parishioners have resolved to increase your salary by one hundred pounds a year. I was very glad to hear it, and I said so. "To show our appreciation of his music," were the exact words of the vicar. Splendid old chap, the vicar!—I like him.'

Barney walked up and down the room as he talked, never glancing at his listener. Langly's eyes filled with tears: he tried to speak, but he could not. Then he lay down on the bed and buried his face in the pillow. His visitor chattered on, pacing to and fro, taking no notice of the other's emotion, until Langly, recovering himself, said, gratefully,—

'It is very, very good of them. They have always been exceedingly kind to me.'

'Oh, it's merely a matter of business. They don't want some other church to lure you away. Trust

a churchwarden! He's always up to snuff. Now, Langly, you must come with me. If you resist, I'll pick you up in my arms and carry you down to my hansom as if you were a baby. Brace up, old man, and come along!'

Faintly protesting, but in his weakness making no resistance, Langly staggered down to Light Street, leaning on Barney's arm. In about half an hour a comfortable domicile was found near the church, and a porter was sent back to Rose Garden Court to fetch the musician's belongings.

The wedding ceremony was all that the best friends of the happy pair could wish. Never had old St. Martyrs' seen such a brilliant assemblage. The splendid wedding-march was a triumph, filling the resonant church with its jubilant, entrancing harmonies, and it was played as no march had ever been played before.

Barney stole away for a moment or two, while friends were pressing round the bride, and drew Betson, the chief press man present, into a corner.

'Now, Betson,' he said, 'you heard that music.'

'It was glorious!' replied the journalist.

'Of course it was, and composed specially for this occasion, remember. You may abuse me in the papers, if you like, Betson; if there's anything wrong—although I don't think there is—lay the blame on me; but one thing I beg of you, and please tell the other fellows this, won't you?—give a line or two of deserved praise to the organist and the music. Do, if you love me, Betson! The man's a genius!—I'm not the only one who says so, although I was the first to recognize the fact. You'll put in something nice about him, won't you? and give the others the tip to do the same.'

'I'll go and see him; then I can do a special article on him.'

'I wish you would; but remember, he's very shy,

and if he suspects your purpose you won't get anything out of him. He's a recluse. Talk to him about organs and music, and let him think you're merely a fellow-enthusiast.'

'Don't be afraid. I'll manage him.'

For a whole week Langly had feared he would not be equal to the ordeal which faced him. He was anxious, for Barney's sake, to acquit himself well; but he was scarcely able to totter to the church for practice and back to his rooms, although, when once seated before the banks of keys, renewed life seemed to animate his emaciated frame; but when the enthusiasm passed away, he was left more deeply depressed than ever. Music was now a stimulant to him, and the longer the intoxication of sound lasted, the greater the reaction.

His meagre frame trembled when he saw how large an audience was to listen to him on the wedding-day; and he prayed that strength might be given him to perform his part flawlessly. When at last the supreme moment came, he looked with breathless fear at his shaking hands hovering over the manuals; but when he touched the keys, and heard the sweet, pure, liquid, low notes come, firm and sustained, like tones from a mellow flute, his whole being thrilled, and he became conscious of an instantaneous hush which fell on the vast assemblage—as though all had simultaneously ceased to breathe, fearing to miss a single golden thread of melody, or the enchanting mingling of those threads into the divinest, most subdued harmony;—as if a choir of nightingales were singing afar off, almost, but not quite, beyond hearing distance. When the music, swelling from its soft beginning, rose towards its climax, Langly knew that he was master of the instrument as he had never been before. All fear left him, and a wild exultation took its place. It mattered nothing whether one or a thousand listened. As he gazed upward, with rapt, ecstatic face, it seemed

to him that the sounds took the form of an innumerable host of angels, flying about the beetling cliff of pipes which towered above him; and his own soul floated there also. Marvelling at this aërial vision, he continued to play with his almost miraculous skill to the end; and as the last notes died away he saw the angels droop their wings one by one and fade into the empty air. He pushed in the stop which shut off the bellows motor; and for a moment his nerveless fingers touched the silent manual, from which the breath of life had departed. Then a mist lowered itself before his eyes; his head sank slowly forward, and Death pillowed it gently on the soundless keys.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE building erected on the site of the factory wing which had been destroyed by fire was larger than the one it replaced; and the plan had been so well thought out that its convenience far excelled that of the companion block, and so the output of the firm was increased in much greater proportion than its greater size seemed to warrant.

'All we need now,' said Sartwell to little Mr. Hope, 'is that the other wing should burn down; then we could have a model establishment.'

Mr. Hope looked up at Sartwell in alarm, as if he expected to see his manager apply the torch to the older building. He never quite fathomed Sartwell's somewhat grim style of humour.

The four houses which had been leased to form a temporary annex to the Works during the erection of the new wing, were kept on; and never in the long history of the firm was so much profitable business done, nor so large a dividend declared, as during the months which followed the completion of the new building. The firm had good cause to be grateful to its manager. Both Monkton and Hope recognized that their constantly increasing prosperity was due to this resolute, self-reliant man; and they rewarded him as capitalists usually reward those who serve them well. Not only was his already large salary increased,

without any demand on his part, but, when the business was formed into a private limited liability company, they allotted him share stock of the nominal value of a thousand pounds, the income from which, should the welfare of the company continue at its then level, would be sufficient to make Sartwell independent for life; and at the first meeting of the new board he was made managing director.

This meeting took place a little more than a year after the new wing had been opened, and Sartwell, addressing his fellow-directors, said—

'I am not good at returning thanks—by words at least; but, as you know, I shall try to make the stock which you have given me a good investment for the new company. It might seem, under the circumstances, that I ought to be well content; yet human nature is hard to satisfy, and I am about to ask for further powers. I want an understanding that I am to have a free hand, in case we should have another strike. I also want the power of increasing the wages of the men—not to exceed, say, ten per cent.—at any time, without the necessity of consulting the board.'

'Why?' asked Monkton. 'The board can be convened at any moment.'

'As a matter of fact it cannot. By our articles of association there must be seven days' clear notice, and the object of the meeting must be stated when the call is made. Now, it may become necessary to act at once, and I want the power to do so.'

'Surely there is no danger of another strike,' said Mr. Hope, anxiously. 'The men had such a severe lesson——'

'A lesson lasts the working-man just so long as his belly is empty, and rarely influences him after his first full meal. The Union is already working up to a demand for increased wages. Times are good, and they know it. We must face an increase of wages, and I want that increase to come voluntarily from

the company, and not under compulsion. You may depend upon me to do nothing rash, but I want the power to announce such increase at any moment.'

The power to act promptly was given to him, and he was assured that, in the event of another strike, the whole strength of the company would be behind him; but he was besought by Mr. Hope to avoid trouble if it were possible to do so.

After the meeting, Sartwell went down to Eastbourne; and, with his daughter, took a long walk on the breezy Downs.

'Well, girlie,' he said, after telling her of the firm's generosity, 'you are an heiress now, on a small scale. I have made over that thousand pounds to you, and as it is really worth ten thousand, I think it is a good deal of money for a little girl like you to accumulate before she comes of age.'

'But I'm not going to accept it, father!' cried Edna. 'I'll make it all over to you again.'

'Then we shall play battledore and shuttlecock with the stock. I generally have my own way, Edna, so you may as well give in gracefully to the inevitable. Besides, this comes as a sort of windfall; I didn't reckon on it, so you don't leave me a penny poorer than I was a month ago. I've laid by a bit of money in my time, and have at last got rid of a fear which has haunted me all my life—the fear of a poverty-stricken old age. That's why I draw such deep, satisfying breaths of this splendid air from the sea. Grey hair came, Edna, before the goal was in sight, but it's in sight now, my girl.'

'I'm so glad, father,' she said, drawing down his head and kissing him.

'Then you will take the windfall, Edna?'

'I will take it on one condition, father.'

'And what is the one condition?'

'That if I ever do anything you disapprove of, you will let me give it back to you.'

The girl was gazing far out at the line where the blue sky and the bluer sea met. Her father glanced at her sharply for a moment.

'Put into English, what does that mean, Edna?'

'You never can tell what a woman will do, you know.'

'Granted, my dear. But you're not a woman; you're merely my little girl.'

The little girl sighed.

'I feel very much grown up, and very old sometimes.'

'Oh, we all do at eighteen. Wait till you're forty; then you'll know what real youth is. If you were a boy now, instead of being a girl, you would have serious doubts about the existence of the Deity, and the most gloomy ideas regarding mankind generally. Why should I disapprove of anything you do?'

'Oh, I don't know. Mother always predicts that our stubborn wills will cross some time, and——'

'Of course, of course. "And false prophets shall arise." Don't let that trouble you, Edna. If our wills become seriously opposed, we will come here to the Downs and talk it all over. I'll warrant we'll hit on a compromise.'

'But suppose a compromise were not possible?'

'Dear me, Edna, what's on your mind? You are talking in generalities and thinking in particulars. What is it, my girl?'

Edna shook her head.

'I don't know why it is,' she said at last, 'but I feel afraid of the future. It seems so uncertain, and I should never like anything to come between us.'

'Nonsense, Edna. What should come between us? All this is merely a little touch of the pessimism of youth, accentuated by the doleful fact that you are now a woman of independent means. Suppose our stubborn wills come into collision, as you fear, do you know what will happen?'

'What?'

'Well—it's an awful thing for a father to say to a daughter—but I'll give way. Think of that! What a humiliating confession for me to make!—a man who has refused to budge an inch before the united demands of some hundreds of men, backed by the pathetic entreaties of his own employers! If that isn't a victory for a small girl, what is?'

'Oh no!' cried Edna, her eyes quickly filling. 'I'll give way—I'll give way—even if it breaks my heart!'

Her father stopped in his walk, and grasped her by the shoulders. The girl's head drooped, and she put one hand over her eyes.

'Ah, Edna, Edna, there's something at the back of all this; I won't ask you what it is, my pet, but some day you'll tell me, perhaps.' He drew her to his breast, and, pushing aside her hat, caressed her fair hair lovingly. 'If your mother were alive, dearest, we—— Well, there is little use of either grieving or wishing. We must make the best of things as they are. But don't bother about the stubborn wills, Edna; we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. You see, we are both competing as to which of us shall give way first; and there's nothing very stubborn about that. Now, my girl, I've disarranged that pretty hat, and a stranger who didn't know, might think you had been crying. This will never do. Let us talk sensibly, for I imagine that before long I'll have all the fighting I need to keep me in form, without having a contest with my only daughter.'

'What do you mean, father?'

'Oh, there's the usual ferment among the men. They are seething and foaming and vapouring, and I feel it in my bones that we shall have another strike before long.'

'Led by Mr. Marston?'

By him, of course. But I'll beat him. I'll crumple

him up so that he will wonder why he ever started the fight. It's a pity to see him waste his energy and his brains in a hopeless struggle. He's clever and indefatigable, but a visionary and an enthusiast, and when he stops dreaming of impossibilities he will be a most valuable man.'

'What impossibilities, father?' asked the girl, almost in a whisper, gazing at the ground.

'The impossibility of men hanging together on any one subject for more than a week. The impossibility of warding off treachery within the ranks. The impossibility of keeping down the jealousy which they always feel towards a man who is their evident superior in education and ability. However he got them, Marston seems to have the manners and instincts of a gentleman. The men are not going to stand that sort of thing, you know, and they will fail him when it comes to a pinch.'

'If you think so well of him, why don't you offer him a good position in the Works, and let him turn his ability towards helping you?'

'My dear girl, you have guessed what is on one of the cards which are up my sleeve. I intend to make Marston my assistant manager—but not now. He will be a valuable man when he awakes, but not while he is dreaming. He must be taught his lesson first, and only hard knocks can teach him that. The boy thinks he is going to be a leader of men, whereas he is merely serving his apprenticeship to become assistant manager of Monkton and Hope, Limited.'

'But suppose he succeeds? Suppose the next strike does not fail? The men held together more than a week last time.'

'That was because they were led by a demagogue of like calibre to themselves. There is a large faction among them who hate Marston, and Gibbons is their leader. I have fought Gibbons, beaten him, insulted him, trampled him underfoot, yet, to-day, Gibbons

loathes Marston while he respects me—as such a man always respects one who has knocked him down. Now, you will be surprised to hear that I have taken Gibbons into my employ, and am giving him better wages than he has ever received in his life before. More than that, when he recommends a man, I promote that man, and it is getting to be generally understood that Gibbons has much influence with the manager. This strengthens his hold on his faction.'

'And what will be the result?'

'That we cannot tell, but it is always good politics to widen a split in the ranks of the enemy. I am playing a game, and I move the pawns about to suit my board. There is a sharp line now drawn between the two factions, and the gap will get more evident as soon as the trouble begins. Gibbons will very likely go out with his adherents, if a strike is ordered; but they will be a source of weakness rather than of strength to Marston; and the moment he makes a false move—which he is reasonably certain to make, not being infallible—there will be a defection.'

'Have you a secret understanding with Gibbons, then?'

'Oh, bless you, no! One doesn't have a discussion about moves with a pawn. The movement of a pawn produces certain effects merely because it is placed in a given position, and not because it has any will of its own. Now Marston is quite well aware of Gibbons's supposed influence with me, and will most likely commit the error of thinking that I have some arrangement with the ex-secretary. In the heat of a discussion he may give voice to his belief, and that will be an error; for no man is so righteously indignant at such a charge as the virtuous individual who would have sold himself if he could. It's going to be an interesting struggle, Edna.'

'Poor Mr. Marston!' sighed the girl.

'Yes, I am sorry for Marston myself; but the lesson will do him a world of good. He is thoroughly unselfish, and Gibbons is as thoroughly selfish. The unselfish man almost invariably goes to the wall in this self-seeking world. Now let us get back, my girl. I think your old father has settled the affairs of the whole universe to his own satisfaction, so there's no more to be said.'

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE year's work had been most encouraging to Marston. He had come to a cordial understanding with many of the Unions, not only at home, but in America and the Colonies, and had formed an active alliance with several societies of working-men in the United Kingdom. Times were good, business brisk, and comparatively few men were out of employment. All this inspired confidence as to the success of a strike; for the demands of men are more certain to be listened to with attention when the market is rising than when it is falling. There would now be much difficulty in filling the shops with competent hands, as employment was general throughout the country; and this had not been the case for years before.

Marston had been secretary of the Union for eighteen months before he made up his mind to begin the contest. He resolved to make a demand for a ten per cent. increase of wages all round, and, if it were refused, to call out the men at once. The committee met in secret session and the demand was formulated. A gathering of the men was ordered for Saturday night, but the subject to be discussed was not stated. Marston impressed on his committee the necessity for secrecy, although Gibbons, who was one of the members, said that he failed to see the object of this,

as their desire was to obtain the increase, and that desire could not be attained except openly. However, he added, Marston was conducting the campaign, and it was but right that he should be allowed to conduct it in his own way; therefore Gibbons merely stated his objection, but did not insist upon pressing it.

A deputation was appointed to seek an interview with the directors and make the demand on Saturday afternoon. After their conference they were to draw up a report for presentation at the meeting of the men.

On Friday Sartwell gathered the artisans together and announced to them that, in view of the state of business, the company had voluntarily come to the conclusion that an increase of wages to the extent of ten per cent. should be given, adding that he hoped the amicable relations between employers and employed at the Works would long continue. This announcement was received with cheers, and the workers, who knew nothing of the meeting of the committee, dispersed well satisfied with the outlook.

It was too late to countermand the gathering ordered for Saturday night, and when it took place some inkling of what had happened was spread abroad; the general opinion being that in some way Marston had been too clever by half, and had met with an unexpected check.

The young man, however, faced the meeting in good fettle, and congratulated them on the increase offered. The men were in jubilant humour, and they cheered everything that was said with the utmost impartiality. Marston told them frankly why the meeting had been called, and he exulted in the fact that the recent unexpected turn of events had made any discussion unnecessary.

'I have heard it hinted,' he continued, 'that I have been out-generalled by Mr. Sartwell, but we can stand a lot of beating on these lines. Mr. Sartwell

is evidently afraid of the Union *now*. If the mere rumour that we were about to make a demand induces so stiff-necked a man as the manager to capitulate before a gun is fired, it goes to show the tremendous influence which we can wield by all standing firmly together.'

It is said that the misplacing of a comma in an Act of Parliament once cost the country a hundred thousand pounds. The one word 'now,' spoken quite unthinkingly by Marston, made Gibbons grind his teeth in helpless rage. He saw Marston triumphant and his own administration discredited. He determined to make that small word of three letters cost Marston dear, if an opportunity of upsetting the confident young man offered itself. However, Gibbons said nothing, and the meeting dispersed with cheers.

Sartwell had no delusion regarding the advance he had made to the men. He knew that he had merely postponed the fight, but he wanted to be in a position to show the directors that he had done everything possible to avoid a conflict. Six months later Sartwell called the directors together.

'I desire to place before you,' he said, 'certain information which I have received. There is reason to believe that a further demand of ten per cent. will be made. If you are going to grant it, I would like to know; if we are going to make a stand, I would like to know. I will then arrange my plans accordingly.'

'If we grant it,' said Mr. Hope, 'what do you think will be the result? Will it avert trouble, or will it be made the basis of fresh exactions? We cannot go on making concessions indefinitely.'

'Giving the increase will probably postpone the trouble for another six months. I am certain that Marston wants to force on a fight; he has been preparing for more than two years. What I want to impress on you is that the struggle, when it comes,

is going to be a severe one, and if you enter upon it, you must do so with your eyes open, resolved to fight it to the very end. You may go on conceding until wages are doubled, and every fresh concession will merely make an ultimate fight the more inevitable.'

'Then you think we had better make a stand now?'

'Yes; if, having made the stand, you refuse to capitulate on any terms.'

'But if we find, when the strike has lasted a few weeks, that we cannot hold out, it would be folly to continue.'

'Exactly. You know your own resources, and I know the resources of the men. You are therefore in as good a position to make up your minds now as two weeks hence, or a month, or a year. If we enter into a contest we must win, or I must resign.'

'It is a most perplexing situation,' sighed Mr. Hope.

'Oh, the situation is simple enough. You either give in or you don't. Which is it?'

'What are the chances of filling the Works with new men, should it prove impossible to come to terms with our present employés?'

'They are not so good as they were. We could do it gradually, but it would be some time before we were in full force again.'

'That would mean the refusal of new orders, and perhaps the cancelling of many now on hand.'

'Undoubtedly. That is the cost of war. We must face it if we fight. We might be crippled for six months to come.'

'That is very serious. Is no compromise possible? Could you not confer with Marston and find out what he wants?'

'I know what he wants.'

'And you think compromise impossible?'

'Frankly, I do.'

'Have you the same objection to meeting Marston that you had to meeting Gibbons?'

'As a matter of principle I object to discussing our business with any outsider. Marston has never raised that point. When it was necessary to confer with me he has always sent a deputation of our own men. He is a much more dangerous opponent than Gibbons was.'

'Would you be willing, then, in the interests of peace, to arrange a conference with Marston, talk the matter over, and come to an understanding, if that be possible?'

'Yes. I will send for him at once; but I don't think it will be of the slightest use, and it forms a bad precedent.'

It was unanimously agreed that such an action on Sartwell's part would strengthen his hands, and that the fight, if it proved inevitable, could be gone into with greater spirit when all knew that everything had been done to avoid hostilities.

Sartwell invited Marston to meet him at his office at seven o'clock in the evening. When the young man entered, his first words were—

'You told me I was not to set foot in this office unless I was ordered to do so; I must apologize, therefore, for coming on a mere invitation.'

'Ah, you haven't forgotten that yet!' said Sartwell, with a laugh. 'But you do forget apparently that you were here on invitation before—during the strike, you know.'

'Yes, so I was.'

'Now, Marston, to begin with, have you any personal ill feeling against me for your summary dismissal?'

'Not the slightest. I should probably have acted as you did under the same circumstances.'

'It is generous of you to say that, but I doubt if you would. However, not attempting to excuse my-

self at all, I may say that the event did not quite turn out as I expected. I hoped that you would call on me, and that we would—well, arrange an armistice, as it were.'

'I thought you knew me better than that.'

'I didn't, you see. But "let the dead past bury its dead." We will now give our attention to the present and to the future, and I shall begin by asking if you have any suspicion that you are a fool?'

'A most diplomatic and soothing beginning, Mr. Sartwell. However, I suppose we are all more or less tinged with folly, so we won't quarrel about terms; but we seem to see the defects of others rather clearer than we see our own.'

'That is undoubtedly true. It strikes me, then, that you are wasting your life, and I would like to convince you of that before it is too late.'

'Yes?'

'Yes. I want an assistant manager. He must be a man of ability and a man I can trust. I am getting on in years, and must soon stand aside. My assistant, if he has the right stuff in him, will take my place, and the future belongs to him. I offer you the position.'

'I cannot accept it.'

'Why?'

'Because I have devoted my life to the men.'

'But you will have an opportunity of doing more for the men in that position than you can possibly do for them in your present office, where they grudgingly pay you barely enough to keep body and soul together.'

'I don't mean the men in these Works, but all working-men everywhere.'

'Rather a large order, Marston.'

'I know it is, but I feel equal to filling it.'

'I don't suppose you imagine I make you this offer because I am afraid of you as secretary of the Union.'

'Oh no! I am well aware that you want to avoid a fight, and I know you are afraid of nothing except that your directors will not back you through to a finish.'

'Do you imagine that your own backers are like adamant?'

'No. My weakness is Gibbons and his gang. Yours is the board of directors. One neutralizes the other, so it will be an interesting fight.'

'Make no mistake, my boy; a capitalist will back his man ten times as long as a worker will his.'

'I haven't your intense admiration for the capitalist. Mr. Hope promised me, almost with tears in his eyes, to look after my future when he found that I was working to settle the other strike which so terrorized him. I and my friends succeeded in breaking up the strike, yet you discharged me a week after, and I doubt if Mr. Hope has ever given a thought to his promise from that day to this. Your capitalist is notoriously timid and thoroughly selfish. The working-man has his faults, of course, and he is himself the greatest sufferer from them; but in generosity he is miles ahead of any capitalist who ever lived.'

'Then you are determined to fight, Marston?'

'Oh no! Not if you give in.'

'How often shall we have to give in?'

'Until such time as the compensation given to the workers is at least equal to the amount taken out by the so-called proprietors of the business.'

'Ah, that is Utopian, which is simply another word for nonsense. Now, why not be perfectly frank and say you are resolved to fight us?'

'My position is this, Mr. Sartwell: I don't want to fight for a fight's sake, and I have no revengeful desire to humiliate you or to defeat the firm for the mere glory of victory; but I am convinced that the men will not get a fair share of what they make until there is a fight and a decisive victory. A few years ago the

very right to combine was Utopian and nonsensical in the mind of the capitalist, yet that right is one of the undisputed facts of to-day. The capitalist won't concede anything until he is forced to do so. Therefore there must be a struggle, and I am bound to choose my own time and my own battle-ground. We are ready to fight now, we are going to fight, and I believe we are going to win.'

'Exactly. That is what I wanted to know. As to winning, we shall see. I quite agree with you that there is nothing so satisfactory in the long run as a square, stand-up fight, and let the best man win. The combatants have a mutual respect for each other afterwards. The trouble is that the contest is rarely free from the side issues which affect the final result. In this case you are not sure of your backers; neither am I. If I were the owner of this establishment, I would bring on the war instantly, carry it through with the relentlessness of a Barbary pirate, win it, of course, and have the most contented men in England in my employ ever after. As it is, the trouble is not going to be decided by either your generalship or mine, but by the relative constancy of our backers. If the men round on you before my directors get a trifle more frightened than they are now, then you will be defeated. If the directors get panic-stricken first, then I shall go under. It will be a hollow victory either way, and will not be decided on the merits of the case at all. It is a toss-up, and, if we were sensible men, we two would settle it now by twirling a penny in the air; besides, if you do win, it will be a barren triumph, for you will lose everything you gain the moment there is a pinch in trade. The only reason you have a show of winning is because business is brisk, and the directors naturally wish to make hay while the sun shines. They don't wish to be crippled and have a wages dispute to contend with, while their trade rivals are reaping the benefit of their embarrass-

ment. The moment trade becomes dull again, down will go the wages, and no power on earth can prevent the fall. It is all a question of supply and demand. On the other hand, I give you fair warning that, if I win, not another Union man will ever set foot in these Works. So if you really have the interests of the men at heart, Marston, you will reflect a bit before you bring on the fight.'

'Do you doubt that I have the interests of the men at heart?'

'No, I don't. I believe you are thoroughly unselfish, but I also believe you are needlessly sacrificing yourself. You see it is difficult for us to come to an agreement, for we look out on the world from entirely different standpoints. You are at the foot of the hill, and the mists of the valley of youth are around you, distorting your vision, and destroying correct proportion. I am up towards the top of the mountain, where the air is clearer. You see men heroic and noble; I see them small and mean. You believe in the working-man; I do not. The chances are that neither of us sees with absolute accuracy, and that the truth lies between the two extremes. Nevertheless, I think the day of chivalrous, unselfish action is past; and it is every man for himself in these times.'

'I can't understand why you talk like that, Mr. Sartwell. I have seen heroic things done even in my short life. I saw a man come out of these Works alone and unprotected, when he knew the mob outside was howling for his blood, yet there was no trace of either fear or bravado about him. The same man nearly lost his life in saving others when the factory was burning; and Braunt, an unlearned working-man, did unselfishly and chivalrously go to his death in the same cause.'

'Ah, Braunt was one of a thousand! Well, perhaps there is something worth preserving in human nature after all, and maybe I am merely growing old and

pessimistic. Anyway, the main point at present is that there must be a trial of strength; so I suppose there is nothing for us to do but shake hands like a pair of prize-fighters before the performance begins. I think you are foolish, you know, not to take the sub-managership.'

The two men shook hands, and Marston departed into the night. Sartwell sat in his office for some minutes thinking over the situation.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE second strike was as clean-cut as the first: that is to say, no laggards remained behind in the Works; there was apparent unanimity among the men, and apparent determination on the part of the masters. To all outward seeming it was to be a straightforward, brutal trial of strength between Capital and the Union. Marston cared little for public sympathy, which Gibbons had considered of great importance; and Sartwell cared for it nothing at all. The public took small interest either way. It was known that the company had voluntarily advanced the wages of the men a short time before, and employers generally said that this showed the folly of sentimentality in business; that no master should advance wages until he was forced to do so. There was no gratitude on the part of the workingman, they averred, and some of the newspapers took the same tone. But even those journals favourable to labour had qualms about the wisdom of the strike, under the circumstances, although they hoped it would succeed.

Marston, however, paid small heed to the comments of friend or foe; he knew that success or failure did not lie in what the papers said, but in perfect organization and in hitting hard. He knew that, if he won, most of the praise would go to the determination of

the men and the opportuneness of the strike; while, if he lost, he would have to shoulder all the censure which had to be bestowed. He picketed the Works in the usual way, choosing for that duty the staunchest of his friends among the men. He asked the remainder of the workers to keep away from the gates, and leave the conduct of the fight entirely to him and to those whom he had chosen as his lieutenants.

Once the fight had begun, Sartwell determined to give no quarter. He resolved to fill up the Works, if possible, with men from outside, and to take back none of the old hands who did not sign a paper promising to abandon the Union. In the former strike he had been anxious to get his men back in a body, and had made no real attempt to fill their places. He knew from the beginning of the second struggle that he was fighting for his life, and that if he suffered defeat he would resign, and the place which had known him for years would know him no more. He had no fear that the company would discharge him if he lost the battle—in fact he knew they would use every effort to induce him to remain; but it was his own stubborn pride, as his wife called it, that he felt he could not overcome even if he had wished to do so. Sartwell, like certain swords of finely tempered steel, would break, but would not bend. Years of unflinching determination in pursuing what he thought to be right had made him a man over whom he himself had but slight control; and he sometimes recognized with grim humour that while he could persuade all his *confrères* to take a devious but safe course with regard to any given problem, he could not induce himself to follow anything but the straight line. He worked night and day at the task of filling the factory with new men. He scoured the country for them, and his telegraphic expenses were enormous; but men were scarce—good men are always scarce, and now even indifferent workers were hard to

find. Gibbons had once said that the working-man of modern times suffers from the fact that he is merely a cog on a big wheel; but this truism tells also against the employer who is trying to fill his shops. If cogs are useless by themselves, it must not be forgotten that the wheel is also useless until some of the cogs are replaced.

It was here that Sartwell experienced the first touch of his opponent's quality, and his anger was lost in admiration of the young man's shrewdness and knowledge of the business. The fight had been conducted so quietly that no one in the neighbourhood would have known, from any sign of disturbance, that war was in progress. Marston made no attempt to buy off the new men, who came and went from the Works unmolested by the pickets. Marston sometimes talked with the strangers, telling them of the strike, and asking where they came from; advising them to get work elsewhere, but never made any attempt either to coerce or to bribe them. Sartwell wondered at this, and hoped his opponent would continue such a mild and harmless warfare; nevertheless, its very mildness made him anxious, and he cautioned the new men to give no information to the strikers, though he was well aware of the uselessness of trying to inculcate secrecy—for men will talk. In fact Marston kept himself well informed of what was going on inside the Works, and saw that the manager was quite shrewdly concentrating his attention on one branch of a department, instead of trying to fill the two buildings simultaneously. He was gradually collecting his cogs from all points of the compass; and by-and-by would have one big wheel and pinion, out of the many wheels and pinions, revolving. One day at noon, when the men came out, Marston, rapidly running his eye over them, saw a new man, and at once he recognized that here was the cog which would set another wheel going.

'You're a new-comer?' he said, accosting him.

'Yes,' answered the man; 'I came this morning.'

'I'd like to have a word with you,' said Marston, keeping step with him.

'It's no use. I know there's a strike. I'm here to work, and I don't care a hang for the Union!'

'Well, it will do no harm to talk the matter over.'

'It'll do no good. I didn't come out to talk; I came out for my dinner.'

'Of course. I'm on the same lay myself; come with me. We can talk and eat.'

'I can pay for my own dinner.'

'Certainly; I'm not offering to pay for it. I don't suppose I get a tenth part of the wages you do; I can see by the look of you that you are a good workman. I'm secretary of the Union, and I get but a few shillings a week. I would tell you how few, but you probably wouldn't believe me, for I could get much more at my trade.'

'The more fool you, then, for working for less.'

'Perhaps. I want to raise the wages of men all over the kingdom, so I'm content to work for little if I can do that. Where did you come from?'

'I'm a Bolton man.'

'Is your family here?'

'No.'

'Why?'

'What's that to you, I'd like to know?'

'It's a good deal to all of us, because it shows that you are not sure of your situation.'

'It shows nothing of the kind. I am guaranteed my situation.'

'Guaranteed! What does a master's guarantee amount to? We're going to win this strike, and then where will you new-comers be? You know what happens when the men go back. Not one of you will be left in the shops. Suppose you do get good wages for a few weeks, what will be the benefit

in the end? A permanent situation at even lower wages would be better.'

'Who says it wouldn't? But I haven't the permanent situation, you see.'

'Now you are talking sense. Are you a member of the Union?'

'I was. I had a row with the foreman, and he gave me the sack.'

'In whose shop was that?'

'At Smighden's.'

'I don't know it. What wages were you getting there?'

'Thirty shillings a week.'

'Do you know Markham, Sarbury & Company, of Bolton?'

'Yes.'

'Would you be satisfied with thirty shillings a week there?'

'Yes; if I could be sure of getting it.'

'You can be sure of it. I will telegraph to the foreman this minute, and we'll have an answer before we finish eating. He has promised to find me places for three men, and I haven't sent him one yet. But don't say a word to any one here, for I want to keep the other two places for Bolton men if they come.'

'I'll not go back to this shop at all if I can be sure of a place in Bolton.'

And so it came about that Sartwell lost his indispensable cog, and the cog never thought it worth his while to give his late master even a word of explanation. He left by the first train for Manchester.

This kind of thing happened several times before Sartwell fully realized the method in Marston's action. He thought at first that Marston had been merely lucky in buying off a man at the very time when such a purchase would block all progress. It was like pulling the linchpin from one of the axles of a wagon. The manager wrote to his fellow-managers in different

parts of the country, and warned them that their foremen were giving places to artisans from the Works of Monkton and Hope, and he received answers saying they would do all they could to prevent such transplanting; but, as it was difficult to trace where a man went, when so few of them were deported, the warning had no result. If a wholesale exodus had been attempted, Sartwell, with the aid of his fellow-managers, might have done something to prevent its success; but the very homoeopathic nature of Marston's remedy made it difficult to cope with. By this time the feeling that he was a beaten man came over Sartwell, and, although he said nothing and sought sympathy from no one, it aged him more than years of toil had done. His daughter, now home from college, saw with helpless grief the deep lines which care was ploughing in his rugged face.

Curiously enough, Marston's quiet but effective methods, which convinced so far-seeing a man as Sartwell that they were ultimately to be successful, had the very opposite effect on the strikers themselves. They did not understand the game, and they saw with increasing uneasiness that the Works were apparently filling up, while nothing was being done to keep the factory empty. Marston did not call meetings and enthusiastically show his hand with an outburst of eloquence, as had been the habit with Gibbons. The men thought he was doing nothing merely because he was saying nothing, and even Marston's own friends began to feel dubious about the result. There was no sign of giving in on the part of the masters, and they saw every day an increased number of men come out of the Works. In spite of Marston's prohibition the strikers began to gather about the gates, hooting the new men when they came out; for hoots and groans seemed to accomplish something, and were at least a relief to the pent-up feelings of the idle men. Marston saw

these signs of revolt with uneasiness; but he thought, as the men this time were not starving, and as they all knew that the Union was still in ample funds, he could keep the strikers in hand until a decisive blow would show Monkton and Hope the futility of further resistance. He had quietly prepared such a blow, and he expected that when it fell, the strike would triumphantly end.

A deputation of the strikers, headed by Gibbons, waited on him, and demanded that public meetings be held—as had always been the custom before—so that the men might be kept informed of the progress of a struggle which vitally affected their interests. Gibbons spoke strongly and feelingly on the subject, as one who speaks from the heart, and the deputation was correspondingly impressed. It was not right, Gibbons held, that they should grope longer in the dark; they wanted to know where they were, and what measures were being taken to bring Sartwell to terms.

'But, don't you see,' protested Marston, 'that any information which I give publicly to my friends at once becomes known to the enemy? I never knew anything to be accomplished by talk. There is generally too much of it in a contest of this kind.'

'I quite agree with you,' said the glib Gibbons; 'but in the absence of talk we would like to have some evidence of action. This sort of thing cannot be kept up for ever. Sartwell is gradually filling the factory, and we are all getting a little restive. We must know what is going on, for it will be no consolation to be told in a week—or two—or three—that you find you have no chance of succeeding, and that we must make the best terms we can. You should not forget that, although you lose no situation, we do. Will you call a meeting and explain to the men what the chances of success are?'

'I will do nothing of the kind. A general does not

call his army together and explain to them what he intends to do next. I am leader of this strike, and I am going to lead it my own way or not at all. You say the factory is filling up, but I tell you that not a stroke of work has been done since the contest began. All I will promise to do is to let you know two weeks before we come to the end of our funds; then, if you do not think we shall succeed, you will have time to make what arrangements you please, and depose me.'

'Oh, such high-handed business as that does not do in this age. You are not an autocrat, remember. The men have every right to demand an account of what you are doing with them and their money.'

'When you were leader, Gibbons, they were at the end of their funds before you let them know anything about it. There was talk enough in those days, and precious little information went with it. I won't conduct a strike with my mouth, and I won't stand any interference.'

'You are our servant, I beg you to remember, and it is no interference when we simply ask to know what is being done and what you intend to do. Now you will either call a meeting of the men at the Salvation Hall, or we will. Which is it to be?'

'I shall not call a meeting. If you call one, then you take the responsibility of meddling in a matter which you don't understand. It is quite possible that you may be able to embarrass, or perhaps defeat me; but if you do, the time will come when the men will curse you for your intervention. I tell you we are bound to win this strike if you keep your hands off. Calling a meeting will merely show Sartwell that we are getting anxious, and his whole hope is centred in a division among us. He was frank enough to tell me so himself.'

'When did he tell you that?'

'Before the strike began.'

Gibbons looked significantly at the deputation, and one or two of the members nodded sadly, as much as to say they wouldn't have believed it; but it was now only too evident, from their secretary's own admission, that he had secret communications with the enemy.

'I think,' said Gibbons, solemnly, 'that, after what you have said, there is all the more reason why you should call the men together, and explain to them how you came to be discussing with Sartwell the probable failure of the strike even before it began. You knew that was a tender point with us long ago; and if Sartwell is your enemy, as you said he was, I can't see for the life of me why——'

'Oh, there is no need of any secrecy about it, Gibbons. In fact there is little mystery about anything we do, and that is one reason I don't want to call a public meeting. Things are bad enough as they are. I have found that Sartwell generally knows what we are about to do before many of us know it ourselves. I went to Sartwell because he asked me to go. He knew this strike was coming on, although I had imagined it had only been discussed between myself and some of the others. He offered me the assistant managership of the Works if I would resign my position as secretary. I refused, and he told me this strike was bound to fail, because the men would not be true to me. You can give the men the whole particulars of my talk with Sartwell, but there is no need of calling a meeting to discuss it.'

'That may all be true, but I confess it sounds rather fishy. I doubt if Sartwell is so much afraid of you as that comes to. Anyhow, there is no harm in finding out just where we stand. I will do my best to calm the apprehensions of the men, but I give you warning that if nothing more encouraging than we have had lately, turns up within a week, there will be trouble. The men will call a meeting themselves if you don't.'

'If nothing happens within a week, I will call

a meeting and give them an account of what has been done so far; but I don't approve of meetings, and I shall call one practically under compulsion. You are forcing my hand, Gibbons, and you promised me fair play.'

'It seems to me that you have had a good run for your money, and I think we are very patient in consenting to wait a week when we are being led we don't know where.'

The deputation then withdrew, and Marston paced up and down the room, wondering if the directors were giving Sartwell as uneasy a time as the men were giving him. As was the case during the former strike, the Salvation Hall had been placed at the disposal of the men. Marston had called no meetings except the one which had ushered in the strike. He made his head-quarters, however, in a room which opened upon the platform, and which also communicated with a narrow lane that led along the outside of the hall to the street. Here his pickets reported to him, and here the work made necessary by the strike—the bookkeeping and the correspondence—was done. Here also letters and telegrams were received. It was a bare room, with only two or three chairs and a rough table as its furnishing. Several religious and moral mottoes were tacked on the boards which formed the walls. 'Love one another' was the sentence that met Marston's eyes whenever he looked up from his seat at the table. He sometimes smiled sadly as he gazed at it. Marston paused in his walk, and sat down at the table on hearing a knock at the outside door. A telegraph messenger entered and handed him an envelope. Marston tore it open, and read the single word—'Stopped.' The word had come from the other side of the earth, travelling from Sydney, New South Wales, to London. A gleam of savage joy lit up the eyes of the young man, and, to the amazement

of the messenger, he brought his fist down heavily on the deal table.

'There is no answer,' he said to the waiting boy, suddenly recollecting that he was not alone; 'and,' he added to himself, 'there will be no answer but one from Monkton and Hope.'

Once more he paced up and down the room, his body quivering with the delight of battle and the foreknowledge of victory. The motto, 'Love one another,' shone peacefully, but unnoticed, on the wall.

CHAPTER XXXVI

WHEN the two years' educational course at Eastbourne was finished, Edna Sartwell had returned to Wimbledon, and had again taken up her position in her father's house. As time went on, Sartwell was quietly pleased to see that there was an absence of that friction between his women-folk which had been his ostensible reason for sending Edna away. He had had but faint hope that the interval of two years would soften his wife's only partially concealed dislike for the girl; but, now that peace reigned over the household, he did not inquire too closely into the cause of the welcome change. He did not know that his daughter now bore uncomplainingly what she had before rebelled against. Mrs. Sartwell's attitude towards education in general was one calculated to discourage the friends of learning. She looked upon a season spent at college as a sinful waste of both time and money. The Apostles, she held, had never even gone to a Board school, and who among present-day people were to be compared with the Apostles? Education was merely a pamperer of that deplorable pride which was already too prominent a characteristic of this conceited nation. She had many texts at her command which went to prove that too much learning was a dangerous thing; and these quotations she frequently presented to Edna, in the

hope that constant repetition of them would mitigate, in some measure, the evil which was sure to follow a period spent at a fashionable and expensive college. Overweening pride was Mrs. Sartwell's especial bugbear; it, more than anything else, was driving modern nations rapidly to perdition. She told Edna, sorrowfully, that she had noticed an unwelcome change in her manner since her return from Eastbourne. The pride which aped humility was ever the most baneful variety of that detestable fault; and Edna's silence in the face of good counsel showed that her pride had assumed the sullen type with which it is so difficult for a good woman to deal. It was only when Mrs. Sartwell—offended by absence of retort and cheated out of her just due of argument by the silence of her adversary—threatened to lay before her husband the appalling results of over-education upon an already haughty nature, that some glimmer of the old rebellion flashed out; yet the rebelliousness, like the hauteur, had been changed by the two years' residence at Eastbourne. That Edna was angry at this proposed appeal to her father, was evident; still there was a reserve and restraint in her indignation which Mrs. Sartwell could not fathom. The girl stood for a moment looking at her, then said very quietly—

'My father has enough to worry him without being bothered by our small affairs. He thinks my two years' absence has made you like me better than you did before I went away, and I wish him to continue thinking so.'

'Like you better? My poor child, it is the love I bear for you which causes me to endeavour, in my humble way—praying that my efforts may be blessed by a Higher Power—to correct those faults which will be your undoing some day.'

'I am speaking of what my father thinks. The moment he finds things are just as bad as they ever

were, then your hold over me is gone. I am now trying to bear patiently and uncomplainingly all that I have to put up with in this house, and I do so for no other reason than to save my father unnecessary trouble. You say that I am proud, resentful, stubborn, and so on. I am far worse than even you have any idea of. It makes me shudder to think of the kind of woman I shall become if I am much longer under your sway. I feel like a hypocrite when I remain silent under your taunts, for I think such things that if I were to put them into words—— Well, we won't talk of that. If you imagine that I have learned meekness because I have lived in a really Christian family for two years, you are very much mistaken; but I have learned that true Christianity does not consist in nagging, with a text at the end of every exasperating sentence. Now, being a woman, I understand you very much better than my father does. You said once that, if he chose me to be mistress of this house, you would lay down your keys and depart without a murmur. You would do nothing of the kind. You would fight for your place. Therefore I want you to understand thoroughly what you may expect if you appeal to my father. The moment you complain of me in any way, or lead him to think there is the least friction, I shall go to him and say that I must be mistress here. What will happen then you know as well as I do. So long as he is not troubled with our affairs, I shall say nothing, and will try to be as dutiful and obedient as if I were your own daughter.'

Mrs. Sartwell sat down, buried her face in her hands, and wept softly, as one does whose tenderest feelings are wounded. It was hard, after having gone through a lifelong contest with one stubborn person, resulting in a most uncertain and unsatisfactory victory —if it could be termed a victory at all—that she should be called upon to face the same problem over again.

She knew that if Edna appealed to her father anything might happen. He would be brute enough to take another house somewhere, and live in peace with his daughter. The man was capable of anything, in spite of all the precepts which she had flung away upon him. However, there was still the consolation that she might save the girl by earnest and devoted persistence in well-doing, and she knew Edna would not protest so long as her father was unmolested; so Mrs. Sartwell agreed that her husband should not be made the referee between them, and Peace once more folded her white wings over the happy home.

Edna had developed into a beautiful woman; more beautiful, indeed, than she herself had any idea of. She was more sedate and reserved than when she had left home, and more prone to sit thoughtfully, chin in hand, and ponder, with her dreamy eyes trying to peer into the future. Resolutely as she had set herself to put Marston for ever out of her thoughts, she never succeeded; and his vibrant, deep-toned voice often came back to her. Although she had been brought up in a democratic way, and theoretically believed that one person was technically as good as another, yet she lived in a country where a grocer's daughter considers it quite beneath her dignity to be seen in company with a greengrocer's daughter; while the daughter of a draper, from her serene social altitude, would have some difficulty in distinguishing the relative status of the other two, although she would be well aware that the adjective 'green' carried comparative degradation with it. Edna was the daughter of a man who had been a workman; yet, when she reflected upon the proposal she had received in the college garden, she was slightly shocked to think that a workman should aspire to the hand of his master's daughter. She had conversed with Marston, and discussed the problems which had interested them both,

yet never for a moment had the thought of equality between them entered her mind. He was merely a workman, and, when that was said, a gulf yawned. But love levels all ranks, as a distinguished man has sung; and, as the young woman meditated on the subject in all its bearings, the social barriers seemed to become less and less tangible. She remembered that no thought of social inequality had ever occurred to her while in his presence. She got no further in the understanding of her own feelings than the conclusion that she liked him very much indeed, and had a strong admiration for his manliness and his determination to succed.

When the strike came on, and she knew that her father and her lover were opponents, her state of mind was one of great perplexity. It was hard that one or the other must be defeated; and she sighed when she thought of the relentlessness of fate in bringing into savage opposition the two men who were now dearer to her than all the world beside.

As the contest continued and she saw her father bending under the storm, ageing perceptibly day by day, becoming more and more silent, her strong affection for him grew stronger; she yearned towards him, wishing she could comfort him, yet knowing that she was helpless. Sometimes a fierce resentment against Marston would spring up suddenly in her heart. He had all the world to fight against, yet he must choose as his antagonist, out of the many millions, her father. It disconcerted her to perceive that this resentment never lasted long; that she found herself sympathizing too with the younger of the combatants, and making excuses for him. A partisan has an easy time of it in this world, compared with one who sees that all the good or all the bad rarely rests with one side solely, but is interwoven like the cotton and the wool in a piece of cloth. Sartwell and Marston each believed he was fighting for the right; but Edna saw

wrong on both sides and right on both sides, although —once the fight was started—she had not the courage to say this to her father.

But, as war goes on, the original right or wrong almost invariably sinks out of sight, and we choose our side from other considerations than those which appeal in times of peace to thinking beings. He who holds aloof is branded as a traitor; and yet man, with his marvellous capacity for self-esteem, flatters himself that he is a reasoning animal.

Sartwell generally came home late, sometimes returning by the last train. It had come to be recognized that it was Edna's privilege to sit up for him; and, although he faintly protested once or twice when he found her there after midnight, it was quite evident that her presence was a comfort to him. She had a soothing, restful way with her, moving silently about the room, anticipating a tired man's needs without unnecessary fuss, and with no irritating questions to ask; yet she was a sympathetic and receptive listener if there was anything to be told. In the wake of some women inanimate nature seems to clash: doors bang, plates fall, cups and saucers clatter, and chairs upset, jangling upon nerves which are unduly sensitive to sound; but Edna could deftly lay out a supper without so much as a chink of china. She knew the value of trivialities—the setting of the arm-chair at just the right angle so that the light fell over the shoulder as it should; the placing of the slippers where the stockinged feet fell into them without effort; and, when her father was too much fatigued to care for the formality of sitting up to the festive board late at night, a small gipsy table, covered with spotless linen and some dainty which might tempt the appetite of a Lucullus, would appear at his right elbow as if they had come noiselessly up through the floor. All this came under the general head of 'pampering' in Mrs. Sartwell's vocabulary; and the good woman,

finding that her example was of no effect in putting a stop to it, retired early to rest, so that she might not countenance such proceedings by her presence. There was a time to eat and a time to drink; and if a man presumed to be hungry at midnight, it was a sin that should be punished by dyspepsia in this world and goodness knows what in the next.

In spite of the compact between them, Sartwell told his daughter little about the progress of the strike; and she, seeing that he was indisposed to speak, forbore to question, feeling that no suggestion which she might have to offer could be of any value, contenting herself with protecting him from annoyance at home, and cheering him as much as possible while he remained there. But it wrung her heart to see him failing perceptibly day after day; his step, for which she eagerly listened, losing more and more of its self-reliant tread.

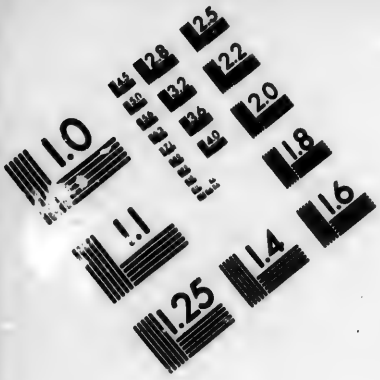
One night she sat in his arm-chair waiting for him, thinking deeply. She looked suddenly up with a start, and saw her father standing beside the table gazing down at her. His face was white, gaunt, and haggard, and the gloom of his countenance was deepened rather than relieved by the sombre smile which parted his lips as he regarded her. He seemed like a man on the verge of a serious illness; and so startled was the girl, that for a moment she looked at him with wide-open eyes, fearing that an apparition stood before her.

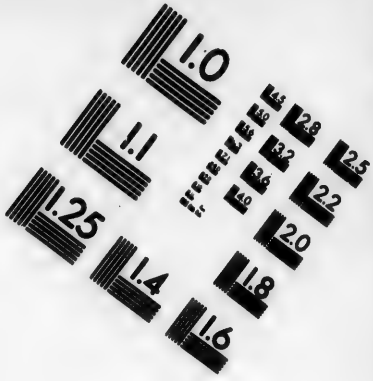
'Father!' she cried at last, springing to her feet. 'What has happened?'

'Nothing, my girl, except that you have been asleep in the chair when you should have been in bed long ago.'

'I don't think I have been asleep, yet I didn't hear you open the door. But you are ill.'

'I'm right enough. A little tired, that's all. No, I won't have anything to eat, thank you. It's after





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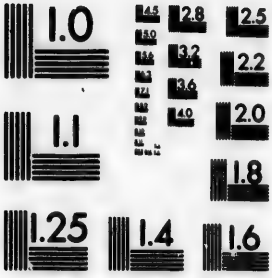

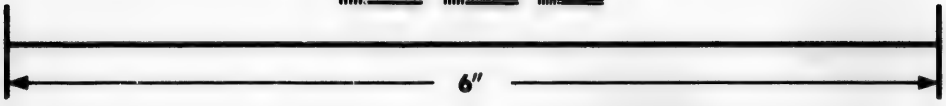

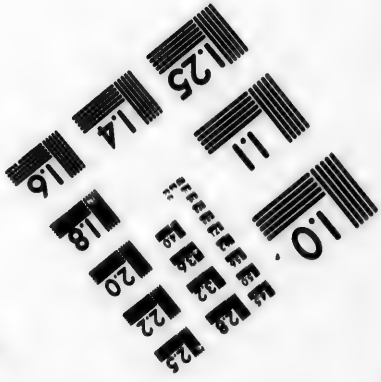

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closing hours, I know; but I'm a traveller, and I'll have something to drink, if you don't mind.'

He tried to laugh a little over this attempted pleasantry, but his laugh sounded dismal, and it frightened the girl still more, instead of reassuring her, as was his intention. The neck of the decanter clattered against the glass like chattering teeth, which seemed to annoy Sartwell; for he muttered something, and shot a glance at his daughter to see if she had noticed his unusual nervousness. Then he grasped the vessel more firmly, pouring the liquor with a steadier hand, but the effort made him tighten his lips. He drank off the liquid and set down the empty glass. Edna stood opposite him; he looked up at her with a wan smile on his lips.

'Well, my girl,' he said, 'the game's up.'

'Has the strike ended, father?' she asked, her voice quavering.

'Actually, no; practically, yes. The firm will give in to-morrow, and I shall resign. Sorry?'

'I am sorry if you are, father,' said Edna, kneeling beside him. 'I am not sorry that the tension has ended, for I think anything is better than the anxiety which you have been undergoing for the past few weeks. And you look positively ill to-night.'

'Yes. A man hates to be beaten. Well, I'm fairly knocked out, and if there is any comfort in a decisive beating, I have it.'

'What has happened?'

'You see, Edna, in the pictures of a battle, we always have the horses galloping, the men firing, or being shot, or cutting down their enemies with the sword; but we rarely get a view of the background, and so people sometimes do not know that it exists: yet the picture shows merely the front of the fight, as it were, while battles are often won by perfect arrangements in the rear—the supply of ammunition, the food and water carriers, and all that sort of thing. Well,

a strike is like a battle; there are other things to consider than the actual fighting, and these things often decide the day. The direct loss in a struggle of this kind is nothing to the indirect loss. We see trade slipping away from us and going to our bitterest rivals. Some of our customers may come back; others will not. Then we are unable to fulfil contracts which we have made, and, as a strike can hardly be called an act of God, we are liable to have damages awarded against us where no strike-clause has been inserted in the agreement. All this I have had to fight, as well as the strikers themselves. Then there is great difficulty in filling up the shops—much more than I expected. During the last week I have been slowly losing ground with the directors. They haven't said very much, but I have felt it. It was in the air somehow that we were fighting a losing battle, and so things have been on the balance, and the only reason the directors did not give in a week ago was that they knew I would resign if they did so. It only required a straw to turn the scales against me. Some time before the strike began, a steamer sailed for Sydney, New South Wales. It had a large quantity of our goods on board. To-day I received notice from the owners that the ship lay there and could not be unloaded because of our strike. They propose to hold us responsible for the delay, and that will mean an expensive lawsuit whichever way the verdict goes. This is serious enough in itself, but the fact that we have been struck from the remotest ends of the earth while being paralyzed in London will make the directors give in at once. So, my girl, I'm a beaten man.'

'But might you not have been beaten in any case?'

'No; another week would have seen the men back—I am sure of it. They are seething with discontent, and have called a meeting for to-morrow night, in spite of the protests of Marston. There is

sure to be a split, and all I need is a slight defection to set the Works going again.'

'Why need you resign, father? You have done your best, and the directors know it.'

'Ah, my girl, you are sleepy; I can see that, or you wouldn't ask such a question. But now you know all about it, so off you go.'

In the morning Edna walked with her father to the station.

'Is there to be a meeting of the directors to-day?' she asked.

'Yes. It is called for five o'clock this evening.'

'Do you think the strike would end in your favour if they gave you another week?'

'I feel morally certain it would. There is sure to be a split at to-night's meeting of the men. You see it is called in direct opposition to Marston's wishes, and that shows he is losing whatever hold he ever had on the strikers.'

'Then wouldn't you be justified in saying nothing about this communication from the shipowners until the next directors' meeting? You would know by that time what the result of the strikers' meeting was.'

'My dear Edna, you make proposals that take away a man's breath. No, that wouldn't do. The directors must have full information. I could not take the responsibility of holding back anything that bore on their interests, whatever might be the result to myself; but I can't help wishing the message had gone astray for a day or two.'

'I am going to your office at six o'clock to-night, father.'

Sartwell laughed, but in a mirthless, despondent manner.

'Hadn't you better come at five and give the directors your opinion of them? I'm sure it wouldn't be very flattering.'

'You mustn't make fun of me, father. The situation is very serious, and I couldn't bear the suspense of waiting until you came home. I must know what happens, so please don't forbid me. Besides, it may be your last night there, and I should like to bring you home with me.'

'Oh, it won't be my last night. I shall not leave the old firm like that. I shall stay until the new manager is installed and everything running smoothly. Even though a man is defeated, Edna, he owes it to himself to retreat in good order, and sometimes a masterly retreat is as fine a bit of generalship as a victory. As everything is perfectly quiet, you may come if you are anxious, as of course you are; or I could telegraph to you, if you would rather. But it is a foregone conclusion, I am sure of that. Whenever they see this message, and learn there has been little progress made in filling up the Works, they will succumb—and I don't know that I can blame them. They have vast interests at stake, and they have backed me well, up to the present, when, if it hadn't been for me, they would have given in long ago. Then I shall look for you at six, my dear. Take a hansom from the station, and ask the man to wait in the yard of the Works. Wait for me in my room if I happen to be absent when you come. I shall tell the commissionaire to look after you.'

The girl watched the train come in and leave; then, turning, she walked towards her home with a heavy heart. She went past the house and on to the Common, unconsciously imitating her father, who, when troubled in mind, sought its breezy expanse. Several times she paused, and thought of sending a telegram to Marston, asking him to meet her in the old garden in Wimbledon at once. There she fancied herself appealing to him to put an end to the strike; but she feared the anger of her father should he discover what she had done, even though

it had been done for his sake. It did not occur to her that perhaps the appeal might be in vain, for she knew that she would do anything asked of her for one she loved, and she had little doubt that the young man had a true and lasting affection for her. What, she asked herself, if Marston made conditions? Would she be willing to accept a great favour and grant nothing in return? What would he think if she telegraphed him to come? The answer was obvious, and, in searching her own heart, she, for the first time, admitted to herself that her reply would be different from what it had been at Eastbourne.

But when it came to the point, she could not bring herself to the resolve of sending a message. She shrank from playing so dangerous a card; for, if it failed to win the trick, how could she face the after humiliation? Something in the self-reliant ring of Marston's voice, something in the dogged determination of his manner, something in the compelling glance of his eye, warned her that not even to please the girl he loved would he be untrue to the flag under which he fought—and something in her own heart told her that she herself would think less of him if he was. Yet, if he refused, she could never speak to him again; she was certain of that. Having made an appeal in vain, she could never grant one of his own, or even listen to it. She thought of the pleasure it would be to her to have him plead his cause once more, and read his answer in her willing eyes before her lips could utter it; but if he refused her when she begged him to spare her father the impending humiliation of defeat, there could be no more friendship between them. Edna at last returned to her home, bewildered in mind, yearning to act, yet hesitating, and listened to a homily on the sinfulness of wasting one's time, although she heard or understood but little of her step-mother's admirable discourse.

As evening drew on the girl became more and more anxious, and impatiently awaited the hour at which she was to leave for London. She half expected a telegram from her father, but as none came she knew the situation had not changed for the better. Shortly after six o'clock her hansom drove into the yard of the Works; the porter was evidently on the watch for her, and had the gates open, closing them after the cab entered. The silent, deserted air of the huge place had a most depressing influence on her as she mounted the stairs that led to her father's office. He was standing at his desk as she entered, entirely alone, and looked round absent-mindedly when he heard the door open.

'Well, my girl,' he said, 'you have come to help pack, after all.'

'If there must be packing, I am ready to help, father.'

'I'm afraid that's all there's left to do, dear. But we're not going to show the white feather, are we? I've just been planning a lovely little tour on the Continent for you and me, where we shall forget, for a time, that there is such an ugly thing as a strike in the whole world. You'll be a princess, and I'll be the old dethroned king; they always went to the Continent, you know, after a defeat.'

Sartwell's attempt at banter was a gloomy failure, and he avoided his daughter's eye, pretending to be sorting out some papers. She saw how hard hit he was, and the tears came into her eyes.

'Is the directors' meeting over?' she asked at last.

'No. They are in there yet, arranging the terms of surrender—or hardly that, for there are no terms. They simply give the men all they ask—which, of course, they might have done a month ago, and saved all this bother. I knew how it would be when they heard about the ship lying unloaded in Australia. There was not an ounce of fight left in them, and

I felt sure a blow dealt so far away would appeal to what little imagination any of them has. It seems to them decisive, but of course it is nothing of the kind. It is merely a theatrical bit of by-play which should have no bearing on the result. But there is little use in kicking against fate. They are at this moment engaged in writing out their letter of capitulation—as if it made any difference how you worded an acknowledgement of defeat and a surrender of your interests to a lot of ignorant, beer-drinking boors who don't—— But what is the use of abuse? Another week of this indecision would have demoralized me; in fact, I think it has done so already, for I don't generally growl.'

'Will you come home with me, father?'

'No, my dear. I shouldn't have let you come all this distance merely to hear what we both knew this morning. Run along home, like a good little girl, and don't sit up for me to-night. I'll be late. Of course, in spite of my scolding, I'll stay till the last dog's hung. I'll see the thing through, and wave the white flag myself. It wouldn't be quite the thing, you know, to have all the fun of the fight and then shirk the submission. I merely came into this room because you were due at six, and to rest my nerves a little. I'm going back to the directors, and will write the letter of surrender myself; for they will never summon up courage enough to do even that, if I am not at their elbows. I'm going down with the ship, my girl, pretending I like it; so off you go, Edna, and we'll feel all right about it next week—perhaps.'

Haggard as he looked the night before, Edna now noticed, with a thrill of fear, that for the first time he seemed an old man. His usually well-set shoulders were bent, and even his neatly fitting clothes hung loosely about him. The hesitation and the tone in which he said the last word, 'perhaps,' showed her

like an electric flash what was in his own mind, and what had never occurred to her before—that when he was suddenly wrenched away from the task that had been his life's work, he would break up in idleness like a useless hulk on the rocks.

'Father,' she cried, 'don't let them send that letter till to-morrow. A day more or less makes no difference, and they will keep it back if you ask them to.'

Sartwell shook his head.

'There is no use in delay,' he said. 'It has always been my habit to do quickly what has to be done, and I am getting too old to change my habits. If you must walk the plank, walk it, and get it over.'

The girl did not urge him further, but kissed him and said, 'Good-night.' He saw her into the hansom, and told the cabman to drive to Waterloo. At the first turning Edna pushed up the little trap-door in the roof of the cab.

'Do you know where the head-quarters of the strikers are?' she asked.

'Yes, miss. At the Salvation Hall, miss.'

'Well, drive me there as quickly as you can.'

The cabby turned his horse, and in a short time was making his way through the crowd of men who were gathering from all quarters to the meeting. He drew up at the kerb in front of the hall. Edna stepped out, flushing as she saw the men looking curiously at her. She said to one—

'Where can I find Mr. Marston?'

'He's in his room at the back of the 'all, ma'am. This wye, ma'am. I'll show you the door.'

Edna followed the man down the long, narrow passage at the side of the hall.

'For God's sake, mates, what's the meaning of this?' cried Gibbons, in amazement, taking his pipe out of his mouth.

Some of the men laughed, but Gibbons looked serious, and they saw that there was more in the incident than appeared on the surface.

'Who is it she wants to see?' cried Gibbons, as the man appeared who had led the girl down the passage.

'She arsked for Marston. She's in with him now.'

'Look here, mates,' cried Gibbons. 'What have I been telling you? We're sold, or I'm a Dutchman! That girl is Sartwell's daughter, and I'll warrant she has come direct from him. I say, cabby, did you drive that young lady here from the Works?'

'What's that to you? You're not paying my fare,' answered the cabman, with characteristic disregard of the threatening crowd.

'He came from the Works; I saw him,' said one of the men.

'Let's get inside, and call this meeting to order,' cried Gibbons, decisively.

CHAPTER XXXVII

EDNA rapped lightly on the door at the back of the Salvation Hall, and heard Marston's voice shout 'Come in.' After a moment's hesitation she opened the door and entered. The young man was alone, sitting at the rough board table, with some papers before him, writing rapidly with a pencil. He seemed absorbed in his work, and kept his head bent over it, saying shortly—

'Well, what is it?'

Edna stood with her back against the door; she tried to speak, but could not. Her heart was beating so rapidly that it seemed to choke her, and her lips were dry. The murmur of numerous voices came through the thin board partitions from the main hall, with a noise of the shuffling of many feet. Marston continued to write quickly; then suddenly he lifted his head with a jerk, stared incredulously into the gathering darkness, and sprang to his feet.

'My God—Edna!' he cried, and seemed about to advance towards her; but she raised her hand, and he stood by the table with his knuckles resting upon it.

'I came——' She spoke in a whisper, so husky and unnatural that it seemed to her the voice belonged to some one else. 'I came—to speak to you—about the strike.'

'Yes?'

'It must stop.'

'It will stop within a day or two. Monkton and Hope are defeated.'

'You mean that my father is defeated. It is killing him, I can see that, although he tries—— He does not know I have come here. I came of my own accord because you—— If you will get the men to go back, I give you my word that he will grant all you are fighting for. All I ask is that you will not make it hard for him. The men do not care as long as they get what they want. Will you do this?'

'Do you mean I am to call the strike off and pretend that the men are defeated?'

'Yes. It will be all the same in the end.'

'Oh, I cannot do that.'

'Why? The men do not care as long as they get what they ask. With my father it is different. He is breaking down. I know I am asking a great deal of you, for you feel as he does, and want to win as badly as he does; but he is old, and you are young. You have all the world before you. What need you care, then, whether you win this strike or not? There are other strikes for you to win, but he—he is fighting his last battle.'

Her voice had become clearer and more like itself as she earnestly pleaded for her father. Some one in the main building had started a rollicking music-hall song then as infectious as an epidemic in the streets of London. The whole house had joined in the swinging chorus, beating time with the tramp of many feet. Neither of the two appeared to hear the song, but both raised their voices slightly to make themselves heard above the sound.

'I care nothing for any personal triumph—nothing at all,' said Marston. 'If I could change places with your father and accept defeat for him I willingly would. But the men have trusted me——'

'The men!' cried Edna, the scarlet chasing the whiteness from her cheeks as her eyes flashed and her voice rose. 'What do the men care? Listen to them!' She waved her hand towards the hall. 'They would sing and shout like that if their best friend was dying. Who has done more for his men than my father? He risked his life for them at the fire, and would do so again. He has built up the Works which have given them employment. He has kept the shops full at a loss when times were bad, so that they might not starve. Every man was sure of his place as long as he deserved it, and no manager in London was more loth than he to discharge a man.' She cast down her eyes as she suddenly remembered that one man had been discharged without cause by her father; then, without raising them, she pleaded again: 'Why will not a real victory, without the name of it, satisfy you?'

'Because it is not for these men alone who are now shouting, that I am fighting. The eyes of all England are on this strike. An acknowledged victory over so strong a firm as that of Monkton and Hope will mean an easier battle for every man who is now earning his bread in this country, when he is compelled to strike for his just due. It will hearten every workingman and be a warning to every employer.'

The chorus in the hall was broken by three sharp raps of a mallet on a table. The sound of the singing subsided, and the voice of some one calling the meeting to order was heard.

Edna slowly raised her eyes and looked at him, with a flash of fearing defiance in them. She spoke in an agitated whisper.

'You remember what you said to me in the garden at Eastbourne. If you will do what I ask of you, I will do as you wish when—when you ask me.'

The young man, his trembling right hand clenching and unclenching nervously, took a step forward.

'No, no!' she cried. 'Stay where you are. Answer me, answer me!'

'Oh, Edna,' he whispered, 'God knows I would do anything to win you—anything—yes, almost what you ask!'

'Yes, or no?' she cried. 'Answer me!'

'I cannot be a traitor to the men!'

As if in approval of this sentiment, a cheer rose from the hall. Some one was speaking, and even in his misery Marston recognized the voice of Gibbons.

Edna turned without a word and opened the door. Marston followed her out.

'Stay where you are,' she said, with a sob.

'I will see you to the station.'

'No; you must not come near me. I hope never to see you again.'

'I will see you to the station,' repeated Marston, doggedly.

The girl said nothing more, but walked hurriedly down the narrow passage, the young man following her. She sprang into the waiting hansom, crying, 'Waterloo; quick!'

The cab whirled away, leaving Marston standing bareheaded on the kerb. He remained there for some moments, gazing in the direction which the cab had taken, then turned with a sigh and walked slowly up the passage to his room. It seemed more bare and empty than ever it had been before, and he could hardly realize that, a few short moments since, she had stood within it. He heard, without heeding, the noise from the hall, like the low growl of some wild beast. He looked at the papers on the table, wrinkling his brow trying to understand what they were all about. It appeared ages since he sat there writing—now he heard nothing but the words 'Answer me!' ringing in his ears. He was startled by another knock at the door, and sprang towards it, throwing it eagerly open, hoping she had returned. Monkton and Hope's

tall, grizzled commissionaire, in his uniform, with the medals dangling from his breast, stood there, perhaps astonished at the sudden opening of the door, but not a muscle of his face showed his surprise. He saluted gravely.

'A letter from the firm, sir.'

'Ah! Step inside. Any answer required?'

'I don't know, sir,' replied the commissionaire, standing as straight and as rigid as if on parade.

Marston tore open the envelope, and the reading of the letter brought him to his senses. It was a terse communication, and informed him that Monkton and Hope agreed to the terms of the men. Mr. Sartwell would wait at his office until ten o'clock to meet Mr. Marston and arrange for the opening of the Works in the morning.

Marston dashed off an official reply, and said he would call on Mr. Sartwell in half an hour's time. Giving this note to the commissionaire, who saluted and withdrew, Marston, with the letter in his hand, opened the door that communicated with the platform and stepped out in the sight of the meeting. A howl of derision greeted his appearance, and the howl of an angry mob is a sound that, once heard, a man never wishes to hear again.

'There he is,' shouted Gibbons, whose speech Marston's entrance had evidently interrupted. 'There he is, and let him deny it if he can!'

'Deny what?' cried Marston.

'Deny that you have been in communication with the enemy! Deny that Sartwell's daughter has only this moment left you!'

'That has nothing to do with you, nor with this strike. England is a free country; a man may talk with whom he pleases.'

'He can't deny it!' shouted Gibbons, at the top of his voice. 'There were too many witnesses this time. She didn't know that a meeting was gathering.

Where now is the man at the back of the hall who cried out it was a lie? I told you I would prove it by Marston himself.'

'Let me read you this,' cried Marston, waving in his hand the letter from the firm, to command attention. He saw the crowd was in that dangerous state of excitement which requires but an injudicious word to precipitate a riot. His own friends, evidently abashed by his admission, were at the back of the hall, silent and disconcerted. The Gibbons gang were massed in front, wildly gesticulating, and vociferous with taunts and threats. They were loudly calling upon him to get down from the platform. He saw, too, that the old committee and others of Gibbons' partisans were on the rostrum behind him, many standing up with their eyes on Gibbons, and the situation reminded him of the time when Braunt had been kicked off the stage and thrust outside.

'Let me read this letter,' he repeated.

'Presently, presently,' said Gibbons. 'You will have your opportunity later on. I have the floor just now.'

'I am secretary of the Union,' persisted Marston, 'and I demand a hearing. After that you may do as you please.'

Here the chairman rose and called loudly—

'Order, order! Mr. Gibbons has the floor. I may add for Mr. Marston's information, since he chose to absent himself from the meeting knowing it was in session, that Mr. Gibbons has been made secretary of the Union by a practically unanimous vote, and I ask Mr. Marston to leave the platform until he is called upon to speak.'

'I have a letter from the firm!' shouted Marston, trying to lift his voice above the uproar.

There was a chorus of howls, and roars of 'Chair, Chair!' 'Come down!' One of the men behind Marston pushed him towards the edge of the platform,

crying, 'Obey the Chair!' This was the signal for a general onset, and, Marston grappling with the foremost of his assailants, both went down together to the main floor. Instantly the meeting broke into an unmanageable mob, while Gibbons roared, 'No violence, men!' and ineffectually waved his arms over the turbulent, seething, struggling mass. His appeals were as futile as Canute's commands to the sea. The chairman pounded unheard on the table with his mallet. Once Marston shook himself free and rose to his feet. His right hand, with the tattered letter still clenched in it, appeared for a moment above the heads of the combatants; then it suddenly vanished, and he went down finally under the feet of the maddened, trampling horde.

The police struck in promptly and with effect. The side door was thrown open, and Marston was dragged out through it, accompanied by several struggling, torn, and bleeding rioters who had been nabbed by the law. Gradually the pounding on the table became audible, and Gibbons' voice, now hoarse with useless calling for peace, could be heard.

'I am sorry,' he began, 'that there has been even a semblance of a disturbance here to-night. It will be used by our enemies against us; but, as you know, it all came about through disobedience to the Chair. I want to say nothing against an absent man, and I am sure we all hope he has not been hurt [cheers]; but if our ex-secretary had calmly bowed to the will of the meeting, and had refrained from laying hands on the man who merely requested him to obey the Chair, this deplorable event would not have occurred. When, after the last strike, you lost confidence in me, I bowed to the will of the majority without a murmur, and, as you all know, I have done my best, ever since, to assist my successor; and now that I have been called again to this position, through no wish of mine, I have but to obey the mandate thus given. I take

it that it is your pleasure that this strike shall now cease. Although I have never said so, I always looked upon the present strike as an unnecessary one, and unjust. The firm, a short time since, voluntarily increased our wages, and this struggle has consequently never had the sympathy of the public, without which no great struggle can succeed. I do not venture to offer suggestions, but if any one here has a suggestion to make, I now give place to him.'

Gibbons did love the sound of his own voice, and it apparently gave pleasure to the majority present, for they loudly cheered all his noble sentiments.

A man promptly arose to his feet, and said it had lately been only too evident that Marston had brought on this strike to further his own advancement, using the men, who trusted him, as tools for that purpose. Gibbons had said nothing on this point, but they all felt sore about it nevertheless; and although he admired Gibbons' good heart in refusing to say a word against a fallen enemy, still the matter ought to be referred to. He moved that Gibbons be appointed to meet Sartwell as soon as possible and arrange terms for going back, getting, if he could, a promise that the 'blacklegs' be discharged. There would be general satisfaction if that promise could be secured.

This was seconded, and carried unanimously. Once more Gibbons rose to his feet.

'A messenger I sent off a few moments ago reports that Sartwell is still in his office. He has been staying late for some time past, so it struck me he might be there now. I will go at once and confer with him, and will return as soon as possible and give you the result of the conference. Meanwhile you can transact any other business that may come before the meeting.'

Sartwell, alone in his office, expecting Marston, was naturally surprised when Gibbons entered instead;

but he greeted the new-comer without showing that his visit was unlooked for.

'Mr. Sartwell,' began Gibbons, going straight to the point, 'I have again been made secretary of the Union. If I end this strike, will you make me assistant manager?'

Sartwell's eyes partially closed, and he looked keenly at his visitor through the narrow slits for a moment or two before answering.

Gibbons fidgeted uneasily.

'We all play for our own hand, you know,' the new secretary added, laughing uncomfortably; 'and I know that with you it is better to say out what one means.'

'We all play for our own hand—yes,' said Sartwell, slowly. '*Can* you end the strike?'

'I think so.'

'You only think so. Well, Mr. Gibbons, come back to me when you are sure, and I will talk to you.'

'I am sure, if it comes to that.'

'Ah, that is a different matter. The meeting, then, after making you secretary, passed a resolution to end the strike?'

'Hardly that, Mr. Sartwell. It has authorized me to negotiate with you. Now, if you promise me the assistant managership, I will bring the men back to-morrow.'

'The strike was bound to end soon without any promises from me. I sent a communication to Marston to-night regarding it. Do you mean to hint that he has not read it to the meeting?'

'He did not. He tried to, but the men had had enough of Marston, and they refused to listen.'

'Quite so. Then it is with you alone I have to deal? Marston is out of it?'

'That is the state of the case.'

'Well, I am sorry I cannot offer you the assistant

managership; although, of course, I hope the strike will end as speedily as possible.'

'Marston said you offered it to him; is that true?'

'I think Marston generally speaks the truth. Let us stop beating about the bush, Gibbons. The men to-night have either resolved to come back, or they have not. If they are coming back, they will come whether I deal with you or not. If not, then I don't see how you can say more than that you will do your best to bring them back. Now, all I shall promise is this: if you bring the men back to-morrow, I will see that your position in the Works is improved.'

'That's rather hard lines, Mr. Sartwell. Marston brought on the strike, and you offer him the assistant managership. I end the strike, and you will make no definite terms.'

'I offered Marston the position before the strike began. Once the fight was on, it had to be fought to a finish. The finish has come, and I think you had better accept the only terms I can offer. Don't you see that, if I were not a man of my word, I could easily promise you anything, and then discharge you a month hence?'

'Well, I'll trust to your generosity, Mr. Sartwell. Now, what will you promise to the men?'

'What do they ask?'

'They wish you to discharge all the blacklegs you have engaged.'

'I'm afraid, Gibbons, I cannot promise that either. I will, however, send home all who want to go and who can find situations, but your men will not suffer on account of the new workmen. I have work enough for you all; there will be plenty to do to make up for lost time.'

'You practically offer us nothing, Mr. Sartwell.'

'Oh yes, I do; I am conceding more than you think. I said in my wrath, when the men went out, that I would never again allow a Union man to set

foot in the Works; but now that they have chosen a moderate, sensible secretary, I am willing to have them come back, allowing them still to remain in the Union. Is that nothing? I think I have been most conciliatory under the circumstances.'

'The meeting is still in session, Mr. Sartwell. Would you mind coming with me and telling the men that you will guarantee every one a place, and that you will not interfere with their membership of the Union?'

'I don't mind going with you, but you can probably make more out of the concessions than I, for you are more eloquent when on your feet. I will simply corroborate what you say, and tell the men the gates will be open for them to-morrow. Meanwhile, just wait for me at the gate. I have a few orders to give to the commissionaire.'

The uniformed man answered Sartwell's call, and stood like a statue to receive his orders. The manager closed the door.

'I am afraid there is not much sleep for you to-night, Commissionaire,' he said, in a low voice, 'but we will make that up to you in some other way, and when the men come back to-morrow you may sleep the whole of the following week, if you like. As soon as Gibbons and I are away, and you have closed the office, I want you to search for Marston. You will very likely find him in his room. I don't know where he lives, but that you will have to find out—quietly, you understand. Ask him from me to give you back the letter you took to him this evening. If he refuses, ask him not to show it to any one until he sees me in the morning.'

The commissionaire brought his heels together sharply, and presently went forth on his vain search; for Marston, unconscious, had been taken in an ambulance to St. Martyrs' Hospital, with the remnants of the letter firmly clutched in his clenched fist.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AGAIN it was the last train to Wimbledon; but Sartwell, tired as he was, strode home from the station with the springy step of a young man. Edna, waiting for her father in spite of his prohibition, heard the step with a thrill of hope. When he came in, there was a smile on his face such as she had not seen for weeks.

'Ah, my girl,' he cried, 'you can never guess what has happened!'

'Yes, I can,' she answered; 'Marston has ended the strike.'

'No, the strike has ended Marston. He has been deposed, and Gibbons has been elected in his place. Gibbons, unselfish man, at once came to me to make terms for himself. So the Works will be open to-morrow; and when the next strike comes, let us hope, unlike John Gilpin, I won't be there to see.'

'And what does Mr. Marston say to this sudden change?'

'I didn't see him. I suppose he has gone to his room to meditate on the mutability of the working-man.'

'I am glad you didn't send that letter.'

'Ah, but the funny thing about it is that I did send it. The commissionaire from the Works is

probably at this moment scouring London to find Marston and get it back. It would be rather a turning of the tables if Marston, in revenge, were to publish the letter. I don't think he will do it, but one can never tell. I confess it would be a strong temptation to me, were I in his place; however, I hope for the best, and have charged the commissionaire to get him to do nothing about it until after he has seen me.'

'Do you still intend to offer him a place in the Works?'

'That will depend. If his experience has driven all the visionary nonsense about the regeneration of the working-man out of his head, he will be a most valuable man for any firm to have in its service. I will see how the land lies when I talk with him.'

'You have no feeling against him then, father?'

'None in the least. Just the opposite. I have the greatest admiration for the way he conducted the fight.'

'You will not resign, will you?'

Sartwell laughed.

'I think not. There will be a lot to do, and I shall want to be in the thick of it. No, our Continental trip is postponed, Edna. Why, my girl, you've been crying, all alone here by yourself! Tut, tut, Edna, that will never do! I thought you had more courage than myself—not that I've had any too much these last few days. Go to bed, girlie, and have a good sleep. I want to be off early in the morning, so you may have the privilege of being my sole companion at breakfast. Good-night, my dear,' he added, kissing her, 'and here's luck to all our future battles!'

Edna was the first afoot in the morning, and the night's sleep, short as it was, had smoothed away all traces of the emotion of the night before. Youth has a glorious recuperative power; but Sartwell, when a little later he came wearily down the stair, showed

that the night had been for him a sleepless one. Even the conqueror has to pay some tribute for the victory. He seemed tired as he took his place at the breakfast-table and unfolded the morning paper. Years of a somewhat uncongenial married life had developed in him the reprehensible habit of reading his paper while he sipped his coffee, and not even the presence of his daughter could break him of the vice; although he had the grace to apologize, which he sometimes forgot to do when his wife was pouring out the coffee.

'I just want to see if the paper has anything to say about the ending of the strike, my dear.'

She smiled at him, and asked him to read what the paper said. A moment later she was startled by an exclamation from him.

'Good heavens!' he cried. 'I had no idea of this. There seems to have been a riot at the meeting—five men arrested, and two in the hospital—Marston—by Jove!—trampled underfoot—never regained consciousness—life in grave danger! I say, Edna, this is serious!'

There was no reply, and Sartwell, looking up, saw Edna, standing with pallid cheeks and lips parted, swaying slightly from side to side.

He sprang up, and supported her with his arm.

'My girl, my little girl!' he cried. 'What is the matter? What is this to you?'

Her head sank against his breast, and she said in a quavering whisper, broken by a sob,—

'It is everything to me, father, everything!'

He patted her affectionately on the shoulder.

'Is it so, my darling, is it so? I was afraid once that was the case, but I thought you had forgotten. There, don't cry; it is sure to be all right. The papers generally exaggerate these things. Come, let us have breakfast, and we will both go to the hospital together.'

Edna's desire for breakfast was gone, but she made a pretence of eating, and then hurried to get ready and accompany her father. It was so early that they had a first-class compartment to themselves, the main stream of travel City-wards not having begun for the day.

Edna was silent, and nothing had been said from the house to the station. When they were in the train, her father spoke with some hesitation.

'Edna, have you seen Marston since the time I found you together in the garden?'

'Yes, father; twice.'

'I don't want you to answer, my dear, unless you care to do so. Where did you meet him?'

'I will tell you everything; I was willing to tell you any time——if you had asked me. I didn't speak of him to you because——I didn't like to.'

'Of course, girlie. I understand. You needn't speak now, if you would rather not.'

'I should like you to know. The first time was at Eastbourne, shortly after I went there. He managed to get unseen into the college garden, and he told me that——he said he hoped——we would be married some day. I told him it was impossible. I thought so——then.'

'That was two years ago?'

'Yes.'

The ghost of a smile hovered about the firm lips of Sartwell; but the corners of Edna's mouth drooped pathetically, and she seemed on the verge of tears. She kept her eyes on the floor of the carriage.

'There was not much use of an angry father's precaution, was there, Edna?'

'I did not know, until he spoke, that you objected to my meeting him. If you had told me, I would not have spoken to him at Eastbourne.'

'Of course you wouldn't, my dear. Don't think I am blaming you in the least. I was merely thinking

that I am not nearly as far-seeing as I thought. And the second time, Edna?'

'That was last night. I drove to the Salvation Hall and asked him to stop the strike. I told him——'

Edna began to cry afresh. Her father, who had been sitting opposite her, crossed to her side, and put his arm about her.

'Don't say another word, my dear, and don't think about it. I'll not ask you another question. You mustn't make people think you have been crying. They will imagine I have been scolding you, and thus you will destroy my well-won reputation for being the mildest man in London.'

The girl smiled through her tears, and nothing more was said until they reached the hospital door.

'How is——Marston, who was brought here last night?' inquired Sartwell, of the doctor who received him.

'Oh, getting on very well, under the circumstances.'

'The papers say his condition is dangerous.'

'I don't anticipate any danger, unless there are internal injuries that we know nothing of. Some of his ribs are broken, and he got a nasty blow on the back of his head. He seems rather weak and dispirited this morning, but his mind is clear. I was somewhat anxious about that, for he was a long time unconscious.'

'There,' said Sartwell to his daughter, who stood with parted lips listening intently to what the doctor said. 'I told you the papers made the case out worse than it was. May we see Mr. Marston?'

'Yes; but I wouldn't make him talk very much, if I were you.'

'We shall be very careful. I think, you know, it will cheer him up to see us, but you might ask him if he would rather we came another time. My name is Sartwell.'

Word was brought back that Marston would be

glad to see them. They found him in an alcove, curtained off, like other alcoves, from the rest of the ward. His face was not disfigured, but was very pale. He cast one rapid glance at the girl, shrinking back behind her father, then kept his gaze fixed on his old employer.

'Well, my boy,' said Sartwell, cheerily, 'I'm sorry to see you on your back, but I'm glad to learn from the doctor that you will be all right in a few days.'

'Have the men——have they——gone back?' Marston asked, in a faint whisper.

'Don't bother about the men. I'm looking after them. Yes, they've come back.'

Marston tried feebly to lift his head, but it sank back again.

'The letter,' he whispered, 'what is left of it——is under the pillow, I think.'

Sartwell put his hand under the pillow and pulled forth the tattered document.

'You intend me to have this?'

Marston, with a faint motion of his head, signified his assent, and Sartwell, with some relief, placed it in his pocket.

'Now my lad, you must make haste and get well. There will be stirring times at the Works, and I shall need the best help I can get. I'm depending on you to be my assistant, you know.'

The young man's eyelids quivered for a moment, then closed over his eyes. Two tears stole out from the corners and rolled down his cheeks. His throat rose and fell.

'I'm a bit shattered,' he whispered at last. 'I'm not quite myself——but, I thank you.'

'That's all right, my boy. Here's a young person who can talk to you more like a nurse than I can. I must see about your having a private room, and all the comforts of the establishment, while you are here.'

Edna took his hand when her father had left the alcove. Marston looked up at her, standing there beside him.

'It came to the same——in the end——didn't it?' he said, with a faint, wavering smile.

For answer she bent over him and kissed him softly on the lips.

THE END

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